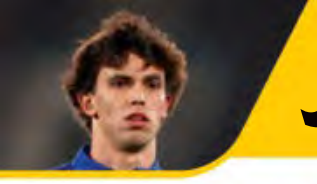

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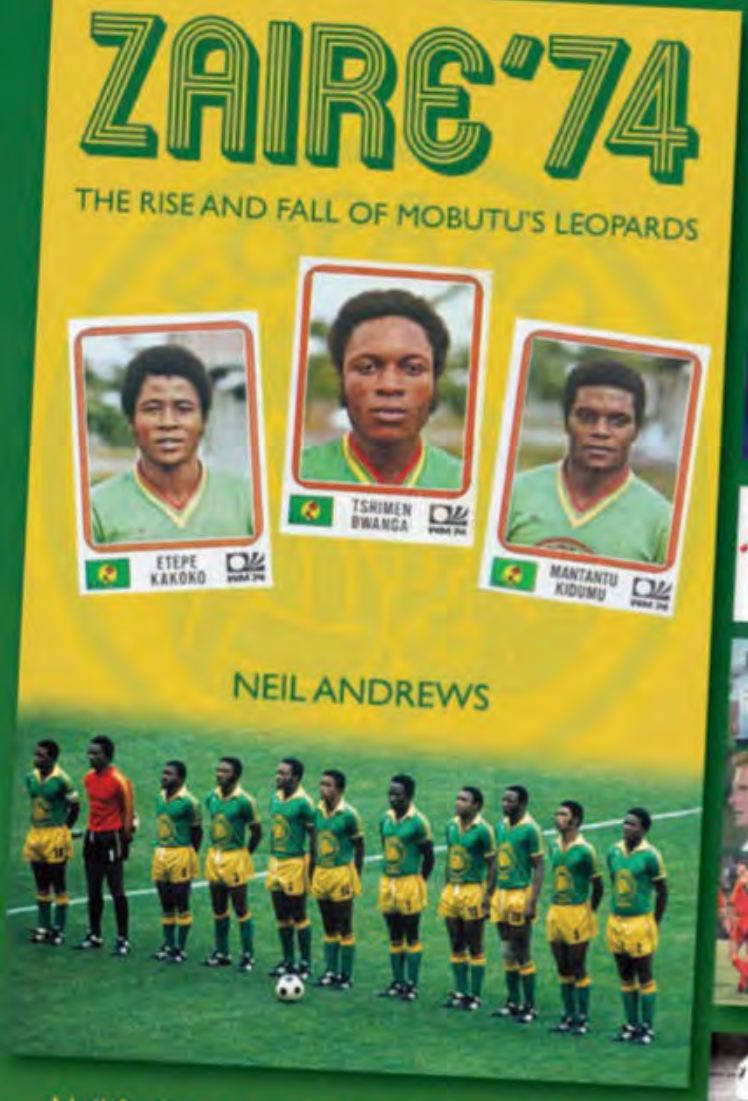

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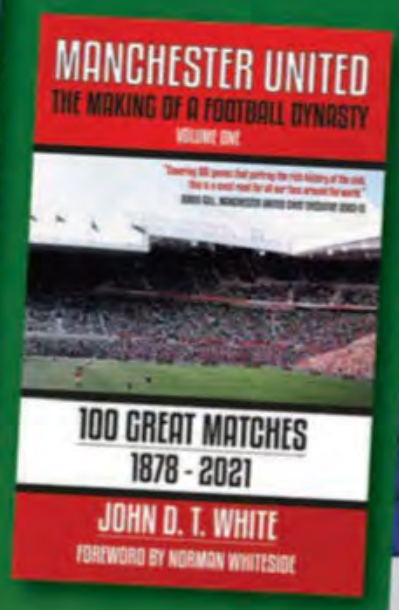

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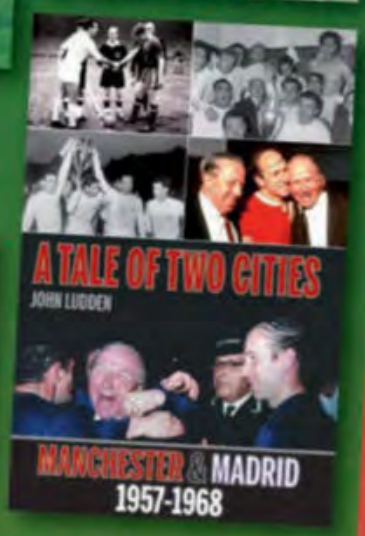

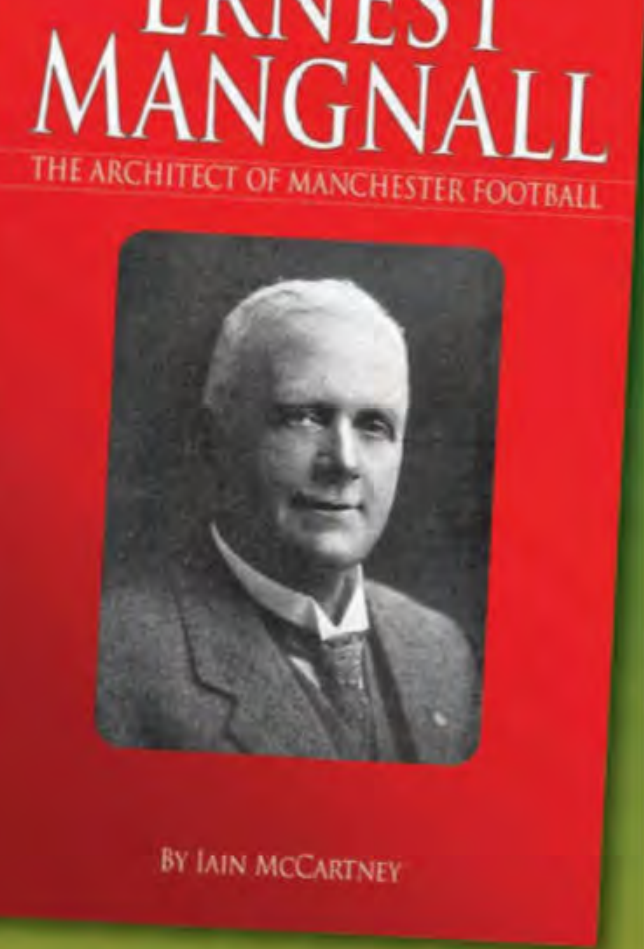

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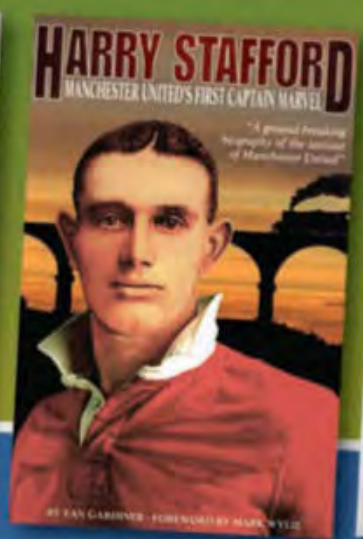

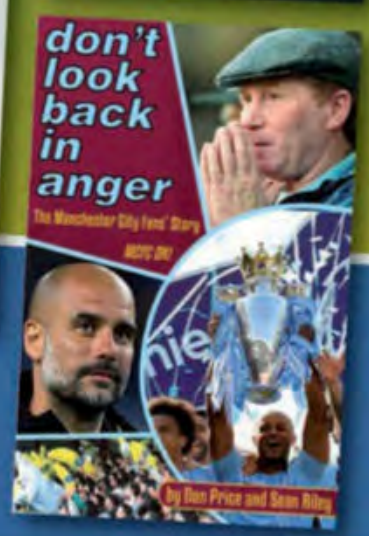

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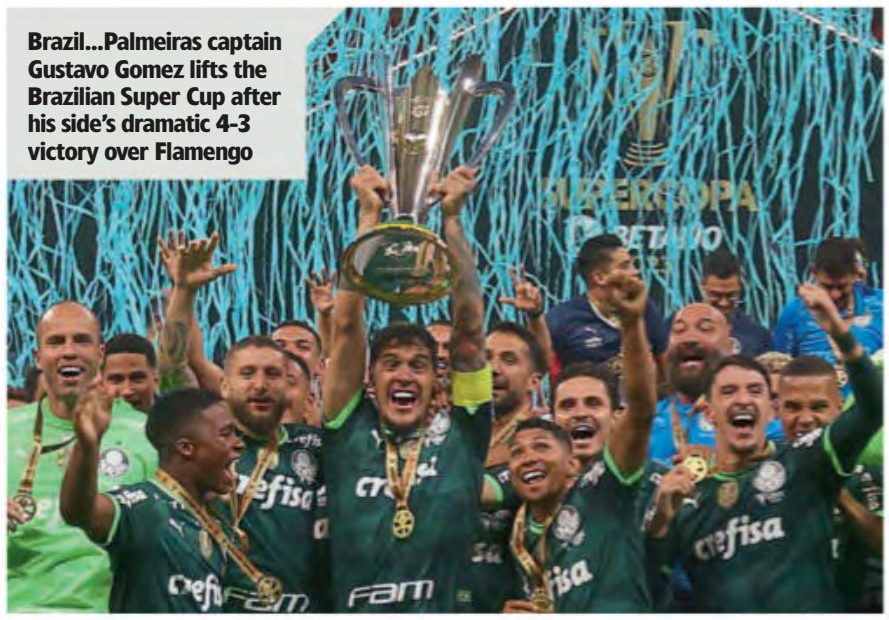

Brazil...Palmeiras captain Gustavo Gomez lifts the Brazilian Super Cup after his side's dramatic 4-3 victory over Flamengo

Saudi Arabia...Lionel Messi walks past Cristiano Ronaldo during the friendly between a Riyadh XI and Paris Saint-Germain

Portugal...Sporting fans watch their team during the Portuguese League Cup final against Porto

United Arab Emirates...Racing Club celebrate after winning Argentina's Super Cup in Al Ain

England...Chelsea fans pay tribute to Gianluca Vialli with a banner of their former striker and manager

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FROM THE EDITOR

After a breathless few months – the World Cup, end of the South American domestic season and culmination of league campaigns in East Asia and Eastern Europe – we attempt to take stock in this issue. Keir Radnedge looks at the landscape of the world game post-Qatar, Glenn Moore tackles the issue of player burn-out in the women's game, and Jamie Evans reviews the trends of the latest January transfer window – along with highlighting the biggest and most intriguing deals.

But the relentless machine that is the football calendar continues full steam ahead. Nick Bidwell poses the big questions ahead of the UEFA Champions League last 16 – as well as focusing on the players to watch in the Europa League and Europa Conference League knockout rounds – while Jonathan Wilson analyses Arsenal's Premier League title challenge and John Duerden looks at the impact Cristiano Ronaldo's arrival might have in the Middle East.

> The relentless machine that is the football calendar continues full steam ahead

The new Major League Soccer, League of Ireland Premier Division and J. League seasons kick-off in February too, with James Nalton, Sean Creedon and Mike Plastow providing insightful previews, while on the international stage congratulations go to Iraq, Thailand and Senegal, who won the Arabian Gulf Cup, Southeast Asian AFF Championship, and African Nations Championship respectively – all of which are covered in detail in World Service.

Finally, we reflect on the life of the late, great Gianluca Vialli, who made an indelible impact on the lives of many Italian and English football fans, with Paddy Agnew writing a glowing tribute in memory of the Italian icon.

Vialli's final, and fitting, contribution to football was to help guide Italy to Euro 2020 glory as part of the *Azzurri*'s backroom staff in 2021, and the countdown to the next Euros, hosted by Germany in 2024, will provide the focus of our next issue. Continue to enjoy riding the football juggernaut.

Stephen Fishlock, Group Editor

British record fee...Enzo Fernandez

EUROPE

Premier League January spending dwarfs the rest of Europe

Enzo Fernandez's £106.8 million move to Chelsea completed a record-breaking January transfer window. The World Cup winner's British record transfer from Benfica ensured that this January window was the most expensive ever.

In a window that highlighted the widening financial gap between the Premier League and the rest of Europe, English top-flight clubs spent a total of £815m – in addition to the £1.9 billion spent last summer – a £520m increase on last January, and almost double the previous winter record of £430m, set in 2018.

The inflated spending was in stark contrast to Europe's other major leagues. In Italy, Serie A clubs had their lowest-spending winter window since 2006, a drop of 84 per cent from last year, while La Liga spending dropped by 63 per cent compared with January 2022.

Ligue 1 and Bundesliga clubs did spend slightly more than last year, although both leagues' biggest deals of the month involved departures to Premier League sides – defender Benoit Badiashile from Monaco to Chelsea and forward Georginio Rutter from Hoffenheim to Leeds United.

Chelsea led the spending, with Fernandez's capture taking them to around £289m in January alone – more than the four other major leagues put together – with that contributing to help set a new overall

"Unfortunately, Ziyech was not done and these are the hazards of the transfer window…the responsibility does not lie with PSG"

PSG coach Christophe Galtier on the club's failed attempt to sign Chelsea winger Hakim Ziyech

record for deadline day, with around £275m spent on the final day of the window.

La Liga president Javier Tebas described the Premier League as a "doped market."

"You can see it clearly in this winter market, where Chelsea have made almost half of the signings in the Premier League," Tebas added. "It is quite dangerous that the markets are doped, inflated, as has been happening in recent years in Europe, because that can jeopardise the sustainability of European football."

UEFA

Chelsea spending prompts FFP rule change

UEFA is set to change its Financial Fair Play rules following Chelsea's signings in the January transfer window.

Under their new owner, Todd Boehly, the Blues have already racked up a net spend of over £500m since the summer without violating any FFP rules. By signing players on long-term contracts – Mykhaylo Mudryk, for example, signed an eight-and-a-half year deal after joining from Shakhtar Donetsk – Chelsea are able to spread the payments to the Ukrainian club in instalments over the course of the player's contract. Benoit Badiashile, Wesley Fofana, Noni Madueke and Marc Cucurella have also all signed long-term deals at Stamford Bridge in the last year, while British record signing Enzo Fernandez penned an eight-and-a-half year deal.

In response UEFA have decided that, from the summer, clubs will only be able to spread transfer payments – a process known as amortisation – over a maximum of five years.

UEFA

Format change for Nations League

A new, expanded format for the UEFA Nations League will come into effect from September 2024, UEFA have announced.

The 2024-25 campaign will include quarter-finals in March 2025 for the top two teams from each group in League A, while promotion-relegation play-offs between leagues will also be introduced. UEFA say the changes will make it a "more compelling competition, with more interesting and attractive knockout matches."

The month in numbers

Eye-catching facts and stats from the world of football this month…

101
Years that Romanian team Astra Giurgiu – who knocked West Ham United out of the 2015-16 Europa League – existed before having their professional status stripped in January.

251
Consecutive La Liga matches played by Athletic Bilbao's Inaki Williams, a record streak that was brought to an end by the winger's injury in January.

Record run…Inaki Williams

7
Minutes that it took Dortmund's Sebastien Haller to hit a hat-trick in a friendly v Basel in January – his second match since undergoing treatment for testicular cancer.

26
Ex-Chelsea players that have gone on to score against them in the Premier League after Willian netted against the Blues for Fulham. No club has conceded as many goals to former players.

83,500
Capacity of Sydney's Stadium Australia, where the 2023 Women's World Cup's opening game will now take place in an attempt to meet ticket demands. It was originally scheduled for the 45,500-seater Sydney Football Stadium.

5
Leagues between Aberdeen and the team that knocked them out of the Scottish Cup, Darvel, who play in the West of Scotland Premier Division. The result was described as the biggest upset in the competition's 149-year history.

£22m
Figure pledged to the Ukrainian war effort by Shakhtar Donetsk chief Rinat Akhmetov following the club's sale of Mykhaylo Mudryk to Chelsea.

15
Serie A points deducted from Juventus after an investigation into the club's past transfer dealings.

2
Days that head coach Davide Nicola was sacked by Serie A side Salernitana before being reinstated by the club's board.

55
Age of ex-Japan international striker Kazuyoshi Miura – the oldest professional footballer in the world – who joined Portuguese second division side Oliveirense on loan in January.

0
Matches won by Kolo Toure as manager of Wigan Athletic, who departed the Championship club after only nine games and less than two months in charge.

53.8%
Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp's win rate in his first 1,000 matches as a manager, a milestone that he passed in January.

24
Years since Newcastle United's last cup final after Eddie Howe's side reached the Carabao Cup final. Victory would bring the Magpies their first domestic trophy since 1955.

867
Number of seats allocated to both Newcastle and Manchester United in new safe standing areas for the EFL Cup final – the first major domestic men's cup final in nearly 35 years in which standing will be allowed in England.

7
Matches that Marseille defender Eric Bailly was banned for after being sent off in the French Cup for a chest-high challenge.

Chest high… Bailly's red-card tackle

"We've been keen to add a little more potency to the side, and Kamaldeen [Sulemana] is someone who does that for us"

Southampton manager Nathan Jones on signing the player who was recorded running at the fastest speed at Qatar 2022

MOST EXPENSIVE DEALS IN JANUARY TRANSFER WINDOW

£106.8m	**Enzo FERNANDEZ**	*(Benfica, Por, to Chelsea, Eng)*
£62.1m	**Mykhaylo MUDRYK**	*(Shakhtar Donetsk, Ukr, to Chelsea, Eng)*
£40m	**Anthony GORDON**	*(Everton, Eng, to Newcastle United, Eng)*
£35m	**Cody GAKPO**	*(PSV, Ned, to Liverpool, Eng)*
£32.7m	**Benoit BADIASHILE**	*(Monaco, Fra, to Chelsea, Eng)*
£32m	**Georginio RUTTER**	*(Hoffenheim, Ger, to Leeds United, Eng)*
£30.7m	**Noni MADUEKE**	*(PSV, Ned, to Chelsea, Eng)*
£28m	**VITINHA**	*(Braga, Por, to Marseille, Fra)*
£26.3m	**Malo GUSTO**	*(Lyon, Fra, to Chelsea, Eng)*
£24m	**Illia ZABARNYI**	*(Dynamo Kyiv, Ukr, to Bournemouth, Eng)*
£22m	**Kamaldeen SULEMANA**	*(Rennes, Fra, to Southampton, Eng)*
£21m	**Leandro TROSSARD**	*(Brighton, Eng, to Arsenal, Eng)*
£20m	**Dango OUATTARA**	*(Lorient, Fra, to Bournemouth, Eng)*
£17.7m	**Max WOBER**	*(Red Bull Salzburg, Aut, to Leeds United, Eng)*
£17.6m	**GERSON**	*(Marseille, Fra, to Flamengo, Bra)*
£17.5m	**Jakub KIWIOR**	*(Spezia, Ita, to Arsenal, Eng)*
£17m	**Victor KRISTIANSEN**	*(Copenhagen, Den, to Leicester City, Eng)*
£16m	**DANILO**	*(Palmeiras, Bra, to Nottingham Forest, Eng)*
£15.8m	**Paul ONUACHU**	*(Genk, Bel, to Southampton, Eng)*
£15m	**Harry SOUTTAR**	*(Stoke City, Eng, to Leicester City, Eng)*
£15m	**Joao GOMES**	*(Flamengo, Bra, to Wolverhampton Wanderers, Eng)*
£14.8m	**Jhon DURAN**	*(Chicago Fire, USA, to Aston Villa, Eng)*
£13m	**Andrey SANTOS**	*(Vasco da Gama, Bra, to Chelsea, Eng)*
£12.4m	**Alex MORENO**	*(Real Betis, Spa, to Aston Villa, Eng)*
£12.3m	**Carlos ALCARAZ**	*(Racing Club, Arg, to Southampton, Eng)*
£12m	**JORGINHO**	*(Chelsea, Eng, to Arsenal, Eng)*
£12m	**Danny INGS**	*(Aston Villa, Eng, to West Ham United, Eng)*
£10.6m	**David Datro FOFANA**	*(Molde, Nor, to Chelsea, Eng)*
£10.5m	**Amin SARR**	*(Heerenveen, Ned, to Lyon, Fra)*
£10m	**Antoine SEMENYO**	*(Bristol City, Eng, to Bournemouth, Eng)*
£9.7m	**Naouirou AHAMADA**	*(Stuttgart, Ger, to Crystal Palace, Eng)*
£9.7m	**Mario LEMINA**	*(Nice, Fra, to Wolverhampton Wanderers, Eng)*
£9.7m	**Youssouf NDAYISHIMIYE**	*(Istanbul Basaksehir, Tur, to Nice, Fra)*
£9.7m	**Lyle FOSTER**	*(Westerlo, Bel, to Burnley, Eng)*
£8.9m	**JEFFINHO**	*(Botafogo, Bra, to Lyon, Fra)*
£8.8m	**Azzedine OUNAHI**	*(Angers, Fra, to Marseille, Fra)*
£8.5m	**Julien DURANVILLE**	*(Anderlecht, Bel, to Borussia Dortmund, Ger)*
£8.2m	**Maximo PERRONE**	*(Velez Sarsfield, Arg, to Manchester City, Eng)*
£8m	**Sasa LUKIC**	*(Torino, Ita, to Fulham, Eng)*
£8m	**Mislav ORSIC**	*(Dinamo Zagreb, Cro, to Southampton, Eng)*
£7.9m	**Andreas SCHJELDERUP**	*(Nordsjaelland, Den, to Benfica, Por)*
£7.5m	**Josip JURANOVIC**	*(Celtic, Sco, to Union Berlin, Ger)*
£7m	**Geronimo RULLI**	*(Villarreal, Spa, to Ajax, Ned)*
£7m	**Jean-Victor MAKENGO**	*(Udinese, Ita, to Lorient, Fra)*
£7m	**Jonas OMLIN**	*(Montpellier, Fra, to Borussia Monchengladbach, Ger)*
£7m	**Yann SOMMER**	*(Borussia Monchengladbach, Ger, to Bayern Munich, Ger)*
£7m	**Ismael KONE**	*(Montreal, Can, to Watford, Eng)*
£6.6m	**Bamba DIENG**	*(Marseille, Fra, to Lorient, Fra)*
£6.2m	**Joel MVUKA**	*(Bodo/Glimt, Nor, to Lorient, Fra)*
£5.8m	**Cesar MONTES**	*(Monterrey, Mex, to Espanyol, Spa)*

Record breaker... Enzo Fernandez

Arsenal arrival... Leandro Trossard

Premier League comeback... Mario Lemina

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

Howe should be a catalyst for change

The revival of Newcastle United has added a fascinating new element to the Premier League title race this season. Strong investment in players by the Saudi Arabian owners is part of the explanation, of course, but equally important has been the astute work of manager Eddie Howe in moulding a dynamic team.

Howe's excellence and instant impact should be no surprise, but clearly was to many observers – perhaps because he is a member of that endangered species best described as the "Lesser Spotted English Football Manager".

At the time of writing, he was one of only four permanent English first-team bosses in the Premier League (along with Gary O'Neil, Graham Potter and Sean Dyche). Four out of 20: an absurd figure. The contrast with other major leagues is stark: 17 of 20 are local in Italy, 13 of 18 in Germany, 15 of 20 in France, 13 of 20 in Spain.

In no other country would a manager as impressive as Howe been made to wait 15 months for his next job after leaving Bournemouth, disdained by a succession of wealthy clubs. Tottenham, Chelsea and Everton all looked abroad during that period, while Manchester United dithered for so long about removing Ole Gunnar Solskjaer that the option vanished.

Impressive...Eddie Howe has guided Newcastle into the top four this season

It is only in England that major clubs routinely turn their noses up at the finest local talent, seeking solutions elsewhere. It is only England that has developed such an inferiority complex.

Italian football likes to think it produces the finest coaches in Europe. Superficially, the track record suggests this is true because so many have had fine careers – from Carlo Ancelotti to Roberto Mancini, Antonio Conte, Fabio Capello and others. The deeper reason is not that they are much better; more that they are given many opportunities to work at a high level – to win, to lose, and above all to learn.

> In no other country would a manager as impressive as Eddie Howe been made to wait 15 months for his next job after leaving Bournemouth

By that time Howe had gone to Newcastle, putting in place the same basic principles of good management that inspired Bournemouth to rise from the fourth tier of English football to the Premier League.

Howe is still only 45, yet has 600 matches of experience as a manager. He retains the vigour of youth while being steeped in the holy trinity of his profession: spirit, fitness and tactics. Get all three right and you can build a winning team. He is doing just that.

Stefano Pioli, head coach of current champions Milan, is now managing at his 13th different club, eight of which are currently in Serie A. Last year's *Scudetto* was his first title triumph.

This season's hottest coach has been Luciano Spalletti, driving Napoli seven points clear by early January. He is at his eighth different club in Italy, with almost 1,000 matches as a coach. Spalletti has never won the *Scudetto*, and nothing at home since the Italian Cup in 2007 with Roma. Yet there was no temptation to write off his talent.

Are the Italians and Germans and Spanish so much better than English managers? Or is the difference merely that they get the chance to learn and bounce back from disappointments?

Howe grafted his way up from the lower leagues. It was his only route into the Premier League pleasure dome. Another English manager at a top club, Graham Potter, learned the trade and developed his principles and methods while operating in Swedish football. He is clearly one of the finest around now, yet it was a shock when Chelsea chose him to replace Thomas Tuchel.

A crucial question hangs in the air: can Howe and Potter help to break the contemptible cycle of English managers being scorned as second-rate?

It is profoundly astonishing that no English manager has won the Premier League title in its 30 years of existence. It is ten years since Tottenham had an English boss; 16 years at Manchester City. There has been no permanent English manager for the last 37 years at both Arsenal and Manchester United.

The numbers brook no argument. They tell the story of a rotten culture that needs to change.

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Elections, power struggles and the 2030 World Cup: football after Qatar

FIFA's unopposed president...Gianni Infantino

So, now that the 2022 World Cup is history, what to expect in the long-awaited post-Qatar era? All peace and light, love and joy in the cause of the beautiful game? After all, a human rights clause has been slotted into World Cup regulations. A box ticked. A wrong righted. So that's OK then?

The World Cup should have drawn a line under the scrapping and scuffling but a bitter legacy will drag on, at least until Gianni Infantino is re-elected as FIFA president in Kigali, Rwanda, on March 16.

Sometimes it seems that politicians – whether in government or sport – want to create problems for themselves. Take the rainbow armband. If FIFA had not objected to its wearing by the captains of only seven teams (fewer than a quarter of the contenders) it would have drawn one day's attention then the media would have passed on.

> The rainbow armband storm prompted three of the Nordic federations to say that, like Germany, they would not vote for Infantino in the FIFA election… It will not make any difference. The deadline for candidates has come and gone

Instead, by threatening heavy-handed sanctions against the players, FIFA turned an issue of moment in the west into a global story. For several days, too. Germany's players kept the pot boiling by placing their hands over their mouths as they lined up before playing Japan to protest losing a denial of the right to free speech.

Not that free speech is ever an unfettered right for footballers. Cristiano Ronaldo had his contract terminated by Manchester United partly for being in breach of contract over his critical TV interview with Piers Morgan. One standard clause in players' contracts stipulates no interviews without the club's permission.

Nevertheless, the rainbow armband storm prompted three of the Nordic federations to say that, like Germany, they would not vote for Infantino in the FIFA election. This is academic. It will not make any difference. The deadline for

candidates has come and gone. Infantino stands alone.

Most of Africa and Asia and Central/North America celebrate his delivery of more development cash, plus World Cup expansion. South America had been having second thoughts at one point but then remembered that Uruguay, Argentina, Chile and Paraguay will be bidding to host the World Cup in 2030. No need to rock the boat.

Several reports claimed that Denmark federation president Jesper Moeller was considering taking the DBU out of FIFA. Not so. Spokesman Jakob Hoejer blamed "a misunderstanding" of comments at a press briefing. But he did add: "We're critical and not satisfied and we'll not vote again for the present FIFA president. We will discuss further actions with our Nordic and European colleagues."

Further dissatisfaction with Infantino had been evinced a week earlier by the German federation head Bernd Neuendorf. Notably, Neuendorf, who took over last spring, broke with tradition by refusing to take up the usual German place in the most powerful committees of both the world and European federations. He had, he suggested, better things to do back home.

The straw that broke the DFB's back was Infantino's reticence to tackle head-on the controversial issues surrounding Qatari preparations and laws. Neuendorf complained that he had expected FIFA to "have made a clearer commitment to human rights and a greater commitment to humanitarian issues." So he will not be voting for Infantino either.

Philipp Lahm, Germany's 2014 World Cup-winning captain and close to the heart of the German football establishment, went further in his syndicated newspaper column. Lahm asked: "What has happened to FIFA, a European institution based in Zurich, which was founded out of a desire for international solidarity by Sweden, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Denmark and Switzerland? Football needs new representatives to deal with its credibility crisis.

"Giving up the armband cannot be the last word...UEFA's associations must fight back in unity, of course, with allies from other continents. We must save the values of football and what this game expresses."

Lahm's appeal has its flaws, most obviously the projection that Europe knew best more than a century ago and still knows best today. This is both pompous and arrogant nonsense as far as the rest of the world game is concerned. Africa, Asia and Latin America are happy to take European money in terms of transfer fees but they resent any suggestion that colonial arrogance should still reign within the government of the world game.

One of the challenges for a European president of FIFA is playing fair with everyone. It's tough. But that is what is needed and Infantino has yet to find the secret of diplomatic balance.

Certainly the chorus of European disapproval will fade on delegates' flights home from Kigali. After all, UEFA is far richer than FIFA even if the world governing body estimates record revenues from the Qatari World Cup of $5.6bn. As one review of comparative accounts pointed out, UEFA revenue amounted to €5.7bn for 2020-21 alone. No wonder FIFA wants to muscle in on the club competition market.

Infantino has not done himself any favours with Europe. He did raise valid points in his hour-long diatribe on the eve of the opening match, but his tone-deaf delivery managed to irritate federations and campaigners on both sides of the rights debates. After all, Infantino had no personal role to defend: he became FIFA president in 2016, more than five years after the Russia/Qatar vote. That was not down to him.

If Infantino is sensible then he should let sleeping Qatari dogs lie and allow time to work its own healing balm. But the temptation to prick European sensitivities appears beyond him. Remember the furore and antagonism generated unnecessarily over the idea of a World Cup every two years?

FIFA may not have learned a lesson. Finance chairman Alejandro Dominguez insisted in Doha that an expanded Club World Cup was still on the table and Infantino, speaking after a FIFA Council meeting before the final weekend of the World Cup in Qatar, confirmed plans to stage the 32-team tournament in 2025, with a women's version to be introduced as well – both held every four years.

Of course an alternative exists. Infantino could play the grand diplomat, cease picking fights and focus his missionary zeal on the upcoming Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand. Or is that too much to ask?

Qatar critic... Philipp Lahm

BOOKS THIS MONTH

SOMETHING IN THE WATER
By Callum Murray (Pitch Publishing, £16.99)

This book explores the inner workings of England's talent hotbeds, investigating how these areas so often create elite footballers. Bringing together the thoughts of those involved at every level – from the south London estate cages and working-class northern towns, to the heights of the Premier League – it unearths the secrets of two distinct types of hotbed that represent the past, present and possible future of English football.

FEELING LEEDS
By Raiford Guins (Pitch Publishing, £16.99)

Gaze into the curious world of the football fan not born and bred in the shadow of their club's ground. From paying $20 to watch Leeds United matches in Florida via dodgy satellite feeds to seeing the Whites clinch a late winner against Aston Villa in December 2018 on his iPhone, this is the story of one loyal fan's commitment to cultivating an emotional connection to the club for nearly 40 years.

Jonathan WILSON
TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

How Arsenal became Premier League favourites

As Manchester City drew against Everton at home and lost to arch-rivals Manchester United away, and Arsenal won at Tottenham in the North London derby and then beat United at the Emirates to go five points clear at the top of the Premier League table with a game in hand, the thought suddenly began to crystallise: maybe this Arsenal are the real thing. Maybe they are not merely title contenders, but the favourites.

It is still relatively early days. Arsenal's win over United was the halfway point of the season. Yet it took them to 50 points, making it one of the strongest first halves of a season in Premier League history. It is a tally that City themselves, despite all their recent dominance, have bettered only once: the record-breaking 2017-18 campaign.

After 19 games of last season, City had 47 points, six points clear of second, and five more than they had at the halfway stage this season. They had scored the same number of goals, 50, but conceded only 12 compared to 20 this season (it feels counterintuitive, but Erling Haaland has, so far, not made City score any more while they have got worse at the back). Meanwhile, further down the table, Arsenal had just 35 points.

And that's what makes what they have achieved so far this season so remarkable. The Gunners are on course for 100 points – a tally that City couldn't match even if they won every single game in the second half of the season. Realistically, 92-94 points would almost certainly be enough to win the league.

The sense that this title is City's to lose lingered for a while, on the assumption that both sides would revert to the mean soon enough. But that sense is beginning to fade.

Of course, the great irony is that Arsenal have got to this position thanks, at least in part, to Pep Guardiola.

Mikel Arteta served his coaching apprenticeship under him and then took Gabriel Jesus and Oleksandr Zinchenko from him. Jesus, in particular, has been vital to how Arteta's Arsenal play. Jesus may not be a great finisher, but he is one of the best forwards in the world at pressing. Before his injury at the World Cup, he had made more interceptions than any other centre-forward in the Premier League, around 50 per cent more tackles and committed significantly more fouls. He was trained in that at City and has brought the instinct to Arsenal.

The goals may have dried up for Jesus after a fecund start, but when other forwards are scoring, it doesn't really matter. And that, perhaps, has been the greatest strength of this Arsenal so far. Captain Martin Odegaard, Bukayo Saka, Gabriel Martinelli and now Eddie Nketiah, deputising for the injured Jesus, have all contributed. The January signing of Leandro Trossard from Brighton gives added depth. There is creativity and striking potency across the forward line – and if they don't get you, there's always Granit Xhaka, thriving in a slightly more advanced role, who has chipped in with goals and assists

Strong start... Arsenal players celebrate scoring against Liverpool in October

> The great irony is that Arsenal have got to this position thanks, at least in part, to Pep Guardiola

Vital...Gabriel Jesus was a key signing

arriving late from deep positions.

The biggest question about Arsenal in recent years was less ability than temperament. They were the sort of side who could be bullied, or whose heads would drop as soon as they went behind. They never seemed a side capable of toughing it out, which is why they lost seven of ten games against the other "Big Six" sides last season.

But this season has been different. Chelsea perhaps were not in great form when they went to Stamford Bridge in November but, still, to restrict them to five shots was a notable achievement – only twice have Chelsea had fewer in a home game since records began in 2003. The two wins over Tottenham have both been very straightforward, but credit must go to how Arteta's team approached and ultimately controlled those games. And, at home to United, Arsenal kept going, increasing the pressure in the final 20 minutes until the winner from Nketiah finally came.

Yet in some ways, games like the win over Wolves in November have been even more impressive, if only for being initially so unimpressive. Arsenal were not at their best and were clearly unsettled by the loss of Xhaka to illness in the first half. Yet, unlike in the draw at Southampton a few weeks earlier, they had the wherewithal to regroup and score twice in the second half, precisely the sort of ground-out result that feels characteristic of title-winning sides.

"There were runners in behind that we probably weren't playing in because we don't want to keep turning the ball over," said Aaron Ramsdale. "It becomes that training regime where you just keep the ball, keep the ball, and there wasn't anything at the end of it. We just had to be a bit braver and a bit quicker on the ball."

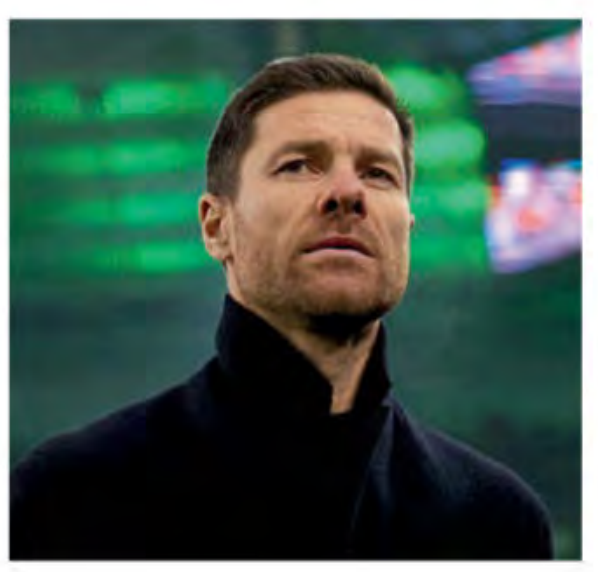
And that, perhaps, is what elevates this current Arsenal side. There is the understanding of training, but also of the way that is to be put into action. Theory is easy, practice is hard but, for now, Arsenal are achieving that.

Stefan BAJCETIC

(Liverpool)

When the Spain Under-18 midfielder scored his first Premier League goal on Boxing Day, he was only 18 years, two months and four days old. Only Michael Owen and Raheem Sterling had scored in the league at a younger age for Liverpool, while Cesc Fabregas is the only Spaniard to have scored in England at a younger age. Since then, Bajcetic has continued to impress in the Reds' struggling midfield and was rewarded with a new long-term contract at Anfield – just five months after signing his previous deal. Began his career at Celta Vigo.

Xabi ALONSO
(Bayer Leverkusen)
After starting his coaching career with Real Sociedad B, the former Spain midfielder has started his first senior role impressively, winning five Bundesliga games in a row between November and January.



Romeo BECKHAM
(Brentford B)
The son of David will spend the rest of this season in Brentford's development squad, on loan from his dad's club, Inter Miami.

Julien DURANVILLE
(Borussia Dortmund)
Dortmund paid Anderlecht €9.6m to sign the Belgium U19 international, who has been compared to the likes of Jadon Sancho and Ousmane Dembele. Doesn't turn 17 until May.

Rasmus HOJLAND
(Atalanta)
The 20-year-old Danish forward looks set to be Atalanta's next exciting young talent after scoring four goals in seven games in January.

"I've been contemplating this for several months and deciding it's the right time for me to retire internationally"

Manchester United defender Raphael Varane on his decision to quit playing for France

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

IN

Loaned in...Joao Felix

Surprise move... Joao Cancelo

Fresh start... Roberto Martinez

EUROPE

Atletico Madrid signed right-back **MATT DOHERTY** on a free transfer from Tottenham, while Brazilian centre-back **FELIPE** left the Spanish club to join Nottingham Forest. He was joined at the City Ground by midfielder **JONJO SHELVEY** (Newcastle), and attackers **GUSTAVO SCARPA** (Palmeiras) and **ANDRE AYEW** (Al Sadd).

Following the departure of Spanish right wing-back **PEDRO PORRO** on loan to Tottenham, Sporting signed **HECTOR BELLERIN** from Arsenal.

Bayern Munich signed **DALEY BLIND** on a free transfer from Ajax.

Celtic continued their recent tradition of shopping in the Far East for new talent by signing **OH HYEON-GYU** from Suwon Bluewings and **YUKI KOBAYASHI** from Vissel Kobe on permanent deals, and **TOMOKI IWATA** from Yokohama F. Marinos on loan, while they also snapped up Canada international **ALISTAIR JOHNSTON** from CF Montreal.

DEJAN LOVREN left Russian side Zenit to re-join former club Lyon.

Wolverhampton Wanderers signed Spain winger **PABLO SARABIA** from PSG for £4.4m and West Ham centre-back **CRAIG DAWSON** for £3.3m.

Athletic Bilbao completed the signing of **ANDER HERRERA** from Paris Saint-Germain after the midfielder spent the first half of the season on loan.

Veteran Algeria striker **ISLAM SLIMANI** joined Anderlecht from Brest.

Former England U21 internationals **NATHANIEL CHALOBAH** and **JOSH ONOMAH** left Fulham on free transfers to join West Bromwich Albion and Preston North End respectively, while another former young lion, **TODD CANTWELL**, left Norwich City for Rangers.

Former France winger **FLORIAN THAUVIN** joined Udinese from Mexican side Tigres UANL.

After exiting Al Nassr to make room for Cristiano Ronaldo, Cameroon striker **VINCENT ABOUBAKAR** joined Besiktas for the third time.

Brighton continued their policy of recruiting unknown youngsters, signing **YASIN AYARI** from Swedish side AIK and **FACUNDO BUONANOTTE** from Rosario Central in Argentina.

In the Premier League, Everton appointed ex-Burnley boss **SEAN DYCHE** following Frank Lampard's sacking, and Southampton hired **NATHAN JONES** to replace Ralph Hasenhuttl, while **GARY O'NEIL** became Bournemouth's permanent manager after a spell as caretaker.

Rangers appointed their former assistant **MICHAEL BEALE** as manager after sacking Giovanni van Bronckhorst, with Beale replaced at Queens Park Rangers by **NEIL CRITCHLEY**. Elsewhere in the Championship, **ROB EDWARDS** replaced Nathan Jones at Luton, **SABRI LAMOUCHI** replaced Mark Hudson as Cardiff City boss, **MICK MCCARTHY** took over at Blackpool, and Norwich City appointed ex-Huddersfield boss **DAVID WAGNER**, while **SHAUN MALONEY** took the Wigan Athletic job after Kolo Toure's brief spell in charge. In League One, former Everton striker **DUNCAN FERGUSON** took his first manager's job at Forest Green Rovers.

PATRICK KISNORBO became the first Australian to take charge of a club in Europe's top-five leagues after being hired by Ligue 1 outfit Troyes, while **ABDEL BOUHAZAMA** replaced Gerald Baticle as Angers manager and **ERIC ROY** took charge of Brest.

Ajax appointed ex-defender **JOHNNY HEITINGA** to take charge of the team until the end of the season following the sacking of Alfred Schreuder.

Bundesliga strugglers Stuttgart appointed **BRUNO LABBADIA** as coach, two months after sacking Pellegrino Matarazzo.

Verona hired **MARCO ZAFFARONI** as manager, with Salvatore Bocchetti relegated to assistant, and Cremonese replaced Massimiliano Alvini with **DAVIDE BALLARDINI**. In Spain, **PABLO MACHIN** replaced Jorge Almiron after just one month in charge of Elche.

JANUARY 2023 MAJOR LOAN MOVES

Albert Sambi Lokonga *(Arsenal to Crystal Palace)*
Arnaut Danjuma *(Villarreal to Tottenham)*
Axel Tuanzebe *(Manchester United to Stoke City)*
Ayoze Perez *(Leicester City to Real Betis)*
Bryan Gil *(Tottenham to Sevilla)*
Cedric Soares *(Arsenal to Fulham)*
Chris Wood *(Newcastle United to Nottingham Forest)*
Cyle Larin *(Club Brugge to Real Valladolid)*
Denis Suarez *(Celta Vigo to Espanyol)*
Diego Llorente *(Leeds United to Roma)*
Djed Spence *(Tottenham to Rennes)*
Fabio Silva *(Wolves to PSV)*
Garang Kuol *(Newcastle United to Hearts)*
Goncalo Guedes *(Wolves to Benfica)*
Hamed Traore *(Sassuolo to Bournemouth)*
Haris Seferovic *(Benfica to Celta Vigo)*
Ivan Ilic *(Verona to Torino)*
Jack Butland *(Crystal Palace to Manchester United)*
Jeff Reine-Adelaide *(Lyon to Troyes)*
Joao Cancelo *(Manchester City to Bayern Munich)*
Joao Felix *(Atletico Madrid to Chelsea)*
Jovane Cabral *(Sporting to Real Valladolid)*
Karl Toko Ekambi *(Lyon to Rennes)*
Kasper Dolberg *(Nice to Hoffenheim)*
Kevin Schade *(Freiburg to Brentford)*
Keylor Navas *(PSG to Nottingham Forest)*
Liam Delap *(Manchester City to Preston)*
Loic Bade *(Rennes to Sevilla)*
Luca Pellegrini *(Juventus to Lazio)*
Marc Albrighton *(Leicester City to West Brom)*
Marcel Sabitzer *(Bayern Munich to Manchester United)*
Marquinhos *(Arsenal to Norwich City)*
Marvelous Nakamba *(Aston Villa to Luton Town)*
Matheus Cunha *(Atletico Madrid to Wolves)*
Matias Vina *(Roma to Bournemouth)*
Morgan Sanson *(Aston Villa to Strasbourg)*
Pape Gueye *(Marseille to Sevilla)*
Pedro Porro *(Sporting to Tottenham)*
Romain Faivre *(Lyon to Lorient)*
Ruslan Malinovskyi *(Atalanta to Marseille)*
Sergi Canos *(Brentford to Olympiakos)*
Tete *(Shakhtar Donetsk to Leicester City)*
Thorgan Hazard *(Borussia Dortmund to PSV)*
Weston McKennie *(Juventus to Leeds United)*
Wout Weghorst *(Burnley to Manchester United)*

"We would have liked to have seen Isco with us, but we have our limits. These were exceeded today, contrary to the previous agreement, so the transfer does not take place"

Union Berlin sporting director Oliver Ruhnert on Isco's collapsed transfer to the club

Belgian champions Club Brugge hired **SCOTT PARKER** to replace Carl Hoefkens, and Brentford's assistant manager **BRIAN RIEMER** left West London to take charge of Anderlecht. Elsewhere, KAS Eupen hired **EDWARD STILL** as coach.

Former Belgium coach **ROBERTO MARTINEZ** took charge of Portugal after the departure of **FERNANDO SANTOS**, who joined Poland following the exit of Czeslaw Michniewicz. Elsewhere, former Ukraine boss **OLEKSANDR PETRAKOV** joined Armenia, **FARUK HADZIBEGIC** took charge of Bosnia and Herzegovina, **SYLVINHO** became Albania manager, **MICHELE MARCOLINI** became Malta boss, and **MICHAEL O'NEILL** returned to take charge of Northern Ireland, replacing Ian Baraclough three years after departing the role.

AFRICA

Former Chelsea and Ghana manager **AVRAM GRANT** took charge of Zambia.

ASIA

Al Nassr made **CRISTIANO RONALDO** the world's best-paid played after his Manchester United contract was cancelled. The Saudi side also signed **AGUSTIN ROSSI** on loan from Boca Juniors for the rest of the season, with the goalkeeper set to join Flamengo in the summer.

Qatar SC signed former Argentina midfielder **JAVIER PASTORE** on a free transfer from Elche, and Al Rayyan signed Morocco winger **SOFIANE BOUFAL** from Angers. Emirati side Al Wahda signed ex-West Brom midfielder **MATHEUS PEREIRA** from Al Hilal.

A-League side Western Sydney Wanderers signed ex-Southampton and Manchester United midfielder **MORGAN SCHNEIDERLIN** on loan from Nice.

South Korean side Ulsan Hyundai signed Swedish midfielder **DARIJAN BOJANIC** from Hammarby.

BRUNO PINHEIRO became Qatar's interim boss after Felix Sanchez's exit.

CONCACAF

In MLS, former Golden Boot winner **JOSEF MARTINEZ** joined Inter Miami from Atlanta United, D.C. United signed former Leeds United stalwart **MATEUSZ KLICH** and Portland Timbers captured Brazilian **EVANDER** from Danish side Midtjylland, while Charlotte FC signed **ASHLEY WESTWOOD** from Burnley.

Tigres UANL were the biggest-spending club in Mexico, signing Uruguay midfielder **FERNANDO GORRIARAN** from Santos Laguna, Argentine striker **NICOLAS IBANEZ** from Pachuca, and Brazilian defender **SAMIR CAETANO** from Watford, as well as Mexico winger **DIEGO LAINEZ** on loan from Real Betis. Pachuca replaced Ibanez with Colombia striker **CRISTIAN ARANGO** from LAFC.

SOUTH AMERICA

River Plate hired former Argentina and Manchester City centre-back **MARTIN DEMICHELIS**, after he began his management career with Bayern Munich II. One of his first signings was Venezuela striker **SALOMON RONDON**, who was released by Everton. Elsewhere, **SANTIAGO ASCACIBAR** re-joined Estudiantes on loan from Hertha Berlin.

Manchester City forwards **NAHUEL BUSTOS** and **KAYKY** both returned to their home countries on loan, with Bustos re-joining former club Talleres and Kayky signing for Bahia.

As well as Uruguay legend **LUIS SUAREZ**, Brazilian side Gremio also signed former Manchester United left-back **FABIO** from Nantes. Meanwhile, Corinthians captured **YURI ALBERTO** from Zenit and **MAYCON** from Shakhtar, while Atletico Mineiro signed winger **PAULINHO** on loan from Bayer Leverkusen, and **AYRTON LUCAS** completed a permanent move to Flamengo, having been there on loan from Spartak Moscow since March.

Appointments, sackings and loans

OUT

French legends... Raphael Varane and Hugo Lloris

EUROPE

World Cup winners **HUGO LLORIS** and **RAPHAEL VARANE** both announced their retirements from the France national team. Other international retirements included Belgium's **EDEN HAZARD** and Spain's **SERGIO BUSQUETS**.

Sevilla terminated the contract of ex-Real Madrid and Spain midfielder **ISCO**, for whom a deadline-day move to Union Berlin fell through at the last minute.

Valencia sacked Italian manager **GENNARO GATTUSO**, having hired him last summer. In France, Nice fired **LUCIEN FAVRE** and Strasbourg parted company with **JULIEN STEPHAN**.

Former England internationals **GARY CAHILL** and **AARON LENNON** both announced their retirements.

AFRICA

Cameroon goalkeeper **ANDRE ONANA** retired from international duty, having fallen out with coach Rigobert Song during the World Cup.

ASIA

CHARLIE AUSTIN departed Brisbane Roar after just six months, returning to his former club Swindon Town.

CONCACAF

At the time of writing, **GREGG BERHALTER** has not had his contract renewed as United States manager. The team is currently being led by interim coach Anthony Hudson.

BLAISE MATUIDI announced his retirement after his Inter Miami contract expired at the end of 2022.

SOUTH AMERICA

Former Brazil and Portugal boss **LUIZ FELIPE SCOLARI** announced his retirement from football, bringing a 40-year coaching career to an end.

"Roberto Dinamite was one of the greatest players in the history of our football. In addition to joining Vasco's beautiful history, he enchanted football fans all over the world"

Brazilian Football Confederation president Ednaldo Rodrigues pays tribute to Brazil legend Roberto Dinamite

OBITUARIES

Roberto DINAMITE
(1954-2023)
Dinamite was one of the finest Brazilian strikers of his generation. He went to two World Cups, hitting three goals as Brazil finished third in 1978 and watched the 1982 finals from the bench, ending his career with 20 goals in 38 games.

Yet it was his displays for his club side Vasco da Gama that really forged his reputation. He holds the all-time scoring records for Vasco, the Rio State Championship and the Brazilian national championship, while he also played more games for Vasco than any other player, cementing his status as their greatest-ever player.

He enjoyed two long spells at the Rio-based side, firing them to a national title in 1974 and a state title in 1977 before joining Barcelona in 1979. The move to Spain was not a success, producing just three goals in all competitions as the Catalan club chopped and changed managers, and the striker soon returned to Brazil to extend his legend at Vasco, winning four more Rio Championships.

According to research by the International Federation of Football History & Statistics, he is one of only 23 players to have scored over 500 goals in top-level football competitions, lying in 20th place on their list of all-time top scorers with 511 in total.

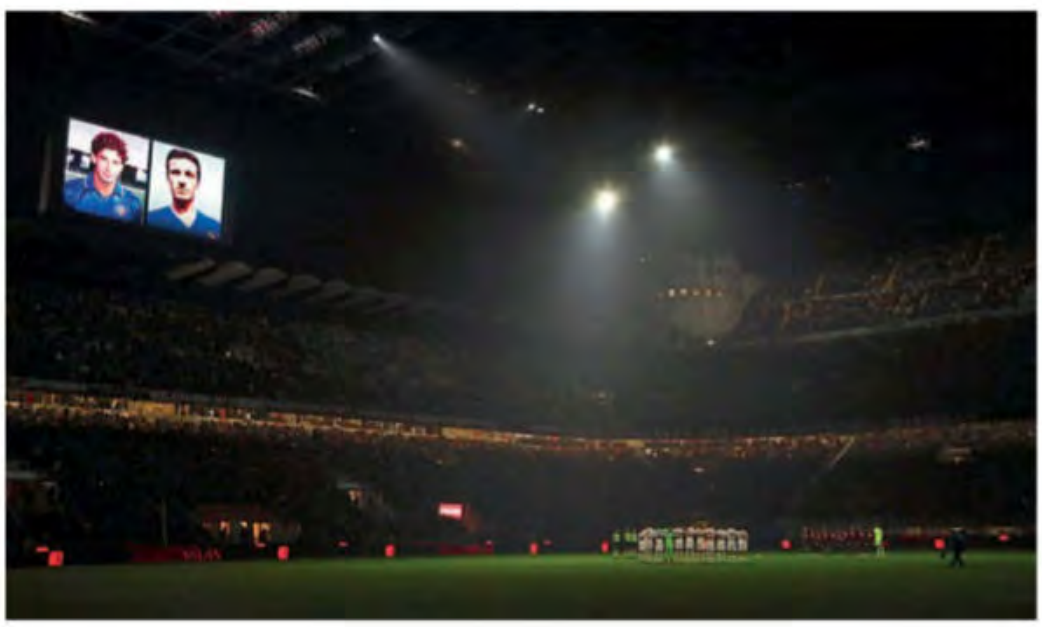
Patrizio BILLIO
(1974-2023)
The Italian midfielder had a brief spell at Crystal Palace after joining from Milan in 1998, then returned to the UK a year later to join Dundee. Later played for Aberdeen before returning to Italy.

Vasco da Gama icon... a statue of Roberto Dinamite at the Sao Januario Stadium

Anton WALKES
(1997-2023)
A graduate from Tottenham Hotspur's academy, Walkes played in League One for Portsmouth before building a career in MLS. He spent two seasons with Atlanta United then joined Charlotte FC for their inaugural campaign in 2022. He was tragically killed in a boating accident.

Gaudenzio BERNASCONI
(1932-2023)
The ex-Italy midfielder spent 11 years at Sampdoria, and was the club's record appearance-maker when he left in 1965.

Ernesto CASTANO
(1939-2023)
The former Juventus captain won three league titles and three Italian Cups during 12 years at the Turin club, and was also Italy's sweeper during their victorious 1968 Euros campaign.



Italian icons... the San Siro pays tribute to Castano and Vialli ahead of Milan v Roma

Rainer ULRICH
(1949-2023)
After a one-club playing career with Karlsruhe, Ulrich enjoyed a long coaching and managerial career. Most notably he worked with Bayern Munich's academy and reserve teams on multiple occasions, with the German giants crediting him with the development of the likes of Dietmar Hamann, David Alaba, Emre Can and Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg, as well as Oliver Kahn as coach of Karlsruhe reserves.

Modeste M'BAMI
(1982-2023)
M'Bami's career burst into life during the summer of 2000. First, he left Dynamo Douala in his home country of Cameroon to join French side Sedan. Before he made his Ligue 1 debut, however, he starred in his country's gold medal-winning campaign at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, notably scoring the golden goal winner against Brazil in the quarter-finals. Three years later he joined Paris Saint-Germain after another successful international campaign, this time finishing runners-up at the Confederations Cup. He won two French Cups in three years in Paris, before joining Marseille. After a spell with Spanish side Almeria, he joined clubs in China, Saudi Arabia and Colombia before ending his career back in France at Le Havre.

Cameroon star... M'Bami celebrates a goal at the 2003 Confederations Cup

Gianluca VIALLI
(1964-2023)
As a Serie A winner with Sampdoria, a Champions League winner with Juventus, an FA Cup winner with Chelsea and a Euro 2020 winner with Italy as a member of Roberto Mancini's backroom staff, Vialli was loved by every team that he worked with. *World Soccer*'s World Player of the Year in 1995. *(Special tribute, page 64)*

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

DECEMBER 2022

SEASON RANKINGS
Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Thibaut Courtois (Real Madrid)	13
Emiliano Martinez (Aston Villa)	7
Wojciech Szczesny (Juventus)	6
Yann Sommer (Bayern Munich)	4
Alisson (Liverpool)	3
Gianluigi Donnarumma (PSG)	3
Kepa Arrizabalaga (Chelsea)	2
Diogo Costa (Porto)	2
David de Gea (Manchester United)	2
Marc-Andre ter Stegen (Barcelona)	2
Ederson (Manchester City)	1
Rafal Gikiewicz (Augsburg)	1
Gregor Kobel (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Mike Maignan (Milan)	1
Simon Mignolet (Club Brugge)	1
Juan Musso (Atalanta)	1
Rui Patricio (Roma)	1
Nick Pope (Newcastle United)	1
Aaron Ramsdale (Arsenal)	1
Geronimo Rulli (Ajax)	1
Brice Samba (Lens)	1
Kevin Trapp (Eintracht Frankfurt)	1

DEFENDERS

Kim Min-jae (Napoli)	14
Joao Cancelo (Bayern Munich)	12
Theo Hernandez (Milan)	12
Eder Militao (Real Madrid)	11
David Alaba (Real Madrid)	10
Ruben Dias (Manchester City)	8
Gabriel (Arsenal)	8
Dani Carvajal (Real Madrid)	7
Josko Gvardiol (RB Leipzig)	7
Achraf Hakimi (PSG)	7
Benjamin Pavard (Bayern Munich)	6
Jordi Alba (Barcelona)	5
Kieran Trippier (Newcastle United)	5
Antonio Rudiger (Real Madrid)	4
Mario Rui (Napoli)	4
William Saliba (Arsenal)	4
Virgil van Dijk (Liverpool)	4
Dayot Upamecano (Bayern Munich)	4
Nathan Ake (Manchester City)	3
Diogo Dalot (Manchester United)	3
Danilo (Juventus)	3
Alphonso Davies (Bayern Munich)	3
Eric Dier (Tottenham)	3
Nicolas Otamendi (Benfica)	3
Thiago Silva (Chelsea)	3
Pau Torres (Villarreal)	3
Sergino Dest (Milan)	2
Giovanni Di Lorenzo (Napoli)	2
Federico Dimarco (Internazionale)	2
Alex Grimaldo (Benfica)	2
Roger Ibanez (Roma)	2
Jules Kounde (Barcelona)	2
Marquinhos (PSG)	2
Lisandro Martinez (Manchester United)	2
Ferland Mendy (Real Madrid)	2
Romain Saiss (Besiktas)	2
Nuno Tavares (Marseille)	2
Rafael Toloi (Atalanta)	2
Marcos Acuna (Sevilla)	1
Manuel Akanji (Manchester City)	1
Toby Alderweireld (Antwerp)	1
Trent Alexander-Arnold (Liverpool)	1
Ronald Araujo (Barcelona)	1
Rodrigo Becao (Udinese)	1
Ramy Bensebaini (Borussia M'Gladbach)	1
Leonardo Bonucci (Juventus)	1
Bremer (Juventus)	1
Marc Cucurella (Chelsea)	1
Matthijs de Ligt (Bayern Munich)	1
Oscar De Marcos (Athletic Bilbao)	1
Denzel Dumfries (Internazionale)	1
Nico Elvedi (Borussia M'Gladbach)	1
Lucas Hernandez (Bayern Munich)	1
Paul Jaeckel (Union Berlin)	1
Reece James (Chelsea)	1
Kalidou Koulibaly (Chelsea)	1
Tyrell Malacia (Manchester United)	1
Noussair Mazraoui (Bayern Munich)	1
Nahuel Molina (Atletico Madrid)	1
Cesar Montes (Espanyol)	1
Gonzalo Montiel (Sevilla)	1
Daniel Munoz (Genk)	1
Strahinja Pavlovic (Red Bull Salzburg)	1
Alfonso Pedraza (Villarreal)	1
Cristian Romero (Tottenham)	1
Amir Rrahmani (Napoli)	1
Alex Sandro (Juventus)	1
Antonio Silva (Benfica)	1
Takehiro Tomiyasu (Arsenal)	1
Kyle Walker (Manchester City)	1
Ben White (Arsenal)	1
Oleksandr Zinchenko (Arsenal)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Kevin De Bruyne (Manchester City)	17
Martin Odegaard (Arsenal)	13
Luka Modric (Real Madrid)	11
Pedri (Barcelona)	10
Federico Valverde (Real Madrid)	10
Enzo Fernandez (Chelsea)	9
Jamal Musiala (Bayern Munich)	9
Jude Bellingham (Borussia Dortmund)	7
Bruno Fernandes (Manchester United)	7
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Gareth Bale

Wales legend embarks on new career

"Wales. Golf. Madrid. In that order."

The slogan that Gareth Bale became synonymous with after celebrating his country's qualification for Euro 2020 will need to be updated after the 33-year-old ended his football career and announced that he would take part in a PGA Tour event in February.

"Delighted to announce I will be playing in the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am at the start of next month!" Bale revealed on social media in January. The event itself took place from February 2-5 (just after this issue of *World Soccer* went to print).

According to Jon Rahm, currently the world's third-best golfer, Bale is more than ready to compete. "He's already good enough," said Rahm. "When he can actually practise more, he's going to get a lot better...he is a very, very good player."

The news came as little surprise to anyone who has followed Bale's career. The Welshman is a notoriously keen golfer – even building a replica of one of his favourite holes in his back garden – often to the frustration of the Real Madrid hierarchy and media. More than once, the Spanish press accused Bale of prioritising golf over football – particularly during his frequent spells out with injury – hence the infamous flag.

Nevertheless, the Spanish giants were among the first to pay tribute to Bale when he announced his retirement at the start of January.

"Real Madrid want to show their thanks, admiration and love for a great legend of our club and world football," read a statement on the club's website. "Gareth Bale was part of our team in one of the most successful eras in our history and will represent forever many of the brightest moments of the past decade. His figure will always be linked to the history and legend of our club."

How Bale's legacy in Spain will ultimately be defined remains to be seen. With five Champions League crowns, three La Liga titles and eight other trophies, as well as 106 goals in 258 appearances, his record is incredible – and the numbers only tell part of the story. Bale was capable of deciding games all by himself with extraordinary moments of skill: his bicycle kick against Liverpool in 2018 was arguably the finest Champions League final goal of all time, while his outrageous solo effort against Barcelona in the 2014 Copa del Rey final is one of the iconic *Clasico* moments, to name but two examples.

Wales. Golf. Madrid ...Bale has changed his priorities

> "Delighted to announce I will be playing in the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am at the start of next month!"
>
> Bale reveals his change of sport on Instagram

Yet despite all that, there was always a sense that Bale could have achieved more. A world-record signing, he only played more than 30 league games in one of his eight seasons in Spain, and never hit 20 league goals in a single campaign either. This was, of course, due to his frequent injuries, but when sympathy for those frailties ran out the relationships turned sour. The injuries were increasingly blamed on his golf, fans compared him unfavourably to Cristiano Ronaldo, while the media accused of him failing to learn Spanish.

Perhaps the glamour of the *Galacticos* simply never suited Bale. He always seemed much happier when with the Wales squad; away from the glare of Madrid's media and with players he had grown up with, such as goalkeeper Wayne Hennessey.

After Wales qualified for Qatar 2022, Bale said of Hennessey: "This guy's performance is the best I have ever seen to date from a goalkeeper ...I would not swap him."

Never mind that Hennessey had just been relegated from the Premier League as Burnley's second-choice goalkeeper, and never mind that Bale has played with the likes of Hugo Lloris, Iker Casillas and Thibaut Courtois. His first loyalty was to his Welsh friends and team-mates; everything else came second.

For Wales, replacing Bale will be impossible. His record of 41 goals is unlikely to be beaten, while his ability to drag them to higher levels is unlikely to be replicated. A rebuild is required for a team that can no longer rely on a talisman to bail them out of trouble.

As for Bale, he is starting an exciting new chapter of his career. Who knows where it will take him.

Jamie Evans

Guillermo Ochoa

Mexican legend returns for another spell in European football

When, just days after the World Cup, it was announced that Mexico's 37-year-old goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa had signed with modest Serie A outfit Salernitana, many fans scratched their heads. In 2019, after a long career in Europe, "Number 13" had returned to Club America, the team that saw him play his first professional match, and it was thought that he would play there for the last years of his successful career.

However, Ochoa has never been a conventional player. He made his debut for America at the age of 18, the most powerful team in Mexico, and very quickly became a big fans' favourite. At only 21, he was selected as a reserve goalkeeper for Mexico at the 2006 World Cup in Germany, and there began a relationship with the national team that has lasted for 17 years.

His career has combined bravery and bad luck. In 2011 he became the first Mexican goalkeeper to play in one of the major European leagues, when he signed for Ligue 1 side Ajaccio. In reality, the move had been a consolation prize for Ochoa, who had already arranged a transfer to Paris Saint-Germain, but a positive doping for Clenbuterol, after eating contaminated meat, put the transfer on hold until FIFA determined his innocence. When they did, a month later, the Parisians had already signed Italian international Salvatore Sirigu.

Despite playing in one of the weakest teams, the Mexican became one of the best goalkeepers in the French league, which, added to a memorable participation in Brazil 2014, earned him a move to Malaga, a team that was challenging for European spots in Spain back then.

But, with no time to adjust after the World Cup, Ochoa found the starting spot blocked by Cameroon international Idriss Carlos Kameni. As a consequence, he had to spend most of his two years in Malaga on the bench and, eventually, emigrate to another modest side, Granada.

There, Ochoa repeated his Ajaccio experience. He was the best player in an extremely weak team, where he conceded 82 goals and ended up being relegated from the Spanish top flight. Despite this, he was one of the supporters' favourite players and they regretted his departure, this time to Belgium with Standard Liege.

But again bad luck accompanied him. After another extraordinary World Cup, in Russia 2018, Napoli made an offer for him, and his transfer to a big club finally seemed sealed. However, in the words of the goalkeeper himself in a recent interview: "The Standard coach changed his mind at the last moment and blocked the move." The Italian team ended up signing another goalkeeper that had impressed in Russia, Colombia's David Ospina.

When he decided to return to America a year later, at the age of 34, to become one of the highest-paid players in LigaMX, it seemed to be the last stage of his rollercoaster career.

He decided to settle his unfinished business in Serie A – not only to quench his thirst for adventure, but also because he hopes to play in a record-breaking sixth World Cup

His stint in Mexico, with his childhood team, was not, however, as successful as he had hoped. Despite coming close every year, he failed to win a title with the Eagles. And after playing his fifth World Cup, in Qatar, he decided to settle his unfinished business in Serie A – not only to quench his thirst for adventure, but also because he hopes to play in a record-breaking sixth World Cup.

His start with Salernitana has somewhat repeated the pattern of his previous stints in Europe. In his first two games, against Milan and Torino, he made 16 saves, and was considered for the Serie A Team of the Week. In the third, Atalanta put eight goals past him, the highest number of his career. Ochoa's rollercoaster ride continues, but he seems to enjoy it.

Martin del Palacio Langer

Another adventure ...Ochoa in action for Salernitana

Luis Suarez

Veteran Uruguayan striker joins Brazilian side Gremio for their return to the top flight

The return of Luis Suarez to Nacional of Uruguay last year was part romantic, part preparation for the World Cup, giving him enough game time to get in shape for Qatar.

In the event, his tournament was a mixed bag. He looked hopelessly off the pace in the opening game – a goalless draw with South Korea that would prove fatal – was a little sharper off the bench in the last 20 minutes against Portugal, and came across as something closer to his old self in the 2-0 win over Ghana, setting up both goals in the victory that painfully proved just insufficient to ensure qualification for the knockout stages.

The question, then, did not receive a definitive answer: is Suarez a spent force? At the age of 36, his best years are obviously behind him. But as well as being Uruguay's all-time record goalscorer, he is one of the leading marksmen in the game. Only four contemporary players have scored more. But what is to come?

It was assumed that after his brief time with Nacional he would move on to the United States, but the move fell through at an opportune time for Brazilian club Gremio. They were interested, and were already in the process of acquiring Nacional midfielder Felipe Carballo when the news broke that Suarez was available. After a quick negotiation, Suarez was presented in front of more than 30,000 ecstatic Gremio fans in early January, along with the pomp of fireworks and light shows.

Gremio suffered a shock relegation from Brazil's Campeonato Serie A in 2021. They go into 2023 back in the top flight and with one of the big names of world football in their ranks.

The fit is obvious. Located roughly a five-hour drive from the Uruguayan border, the city of Porto Alegre is Brazil at its most Uruguayan. Suarez will not have problems of adaptation. A decade ago, his former Uruguay strike partner Diego Forlan was lured to Internacional, Gremio's great city rivals, where he played some of the best football of his late career. Compatriots of Suarez such as defenders Atilio Ancheta and Hugo De Leon are Gremio idols. The striker's notorious will to win is bound to enthuse the club's supporters.

But this new challenge is very different from playing in the Uruguayan championship, where Suarez helped Nacional to yet another league title at the end of October. Football in Uruguay is largely confined to one city. The life of Suarez, especially once the Brazilian league gets underway in mid-April, will be full of tiring long journeys, and the matches will come thick and fast.

Welcome to Porto Alegre...Suarez hit a hat-trick and won the Recopa Gaucha on his Gremio debut

Suarez has declared himself obsessed with the Copa Libertadores, South America's Champions League. But first he has to help Gremio qualify

Suarez is believed to have rejected offers from Brazilian clubs last year because he saw the calendar as too rigorous for a player looking to get into form for the World Cup.

But there will not be any international club competition this year. The big frustration of his time

Unveiling...Suarez is presented to the Gremio fans at the Arena do Gremio

with Nacional was their elimination from the Copa Sudamericana, the continent's Europa League equivalent. The games against Atletico Goianiense of Brazil early in August came too soon for Suarez, right at the start of his spell and well before he was fully fit. His appearances off the bench were not enough to save Nacional from elimination (4-0 on aggregate) and keep alive the big dream of his return home – that of carrying the team to an international title.

Suarez has declared himself obsessed with the Copa Libertadores, South America's Champions League. But first he has to help Gremio qualify. They spent last year in Brazil's second division, and did not have the chance to book a place in a continental competition. Suarez is on a two-year contract. The aim in 2023 will surely be to win a place in the Libertadores, and then launch an assault on the title the following year.

Rationing efforts for cup competitions has become a common strategy in Brazil, as it is extremely difficult to compete with Palmeiras and Flamengo over the long course of a league campaign. Success in the cup competitions – the domestic cup is also highly prestigious – will probably form much of the judgement on the time that Suarez spends at Gremio.

Not everyone is convinced that things will work out. Paulo Vinicius Coelho, one of Brazil's most influential journalists, put his reservations in succinct and pithy form: "I think the signing of Suarez is great from a marketing point of view," he said, "doubtful from a technical point of view and bad from the point of view of a country that sells its promises at 16 and buys in big names at 35."

The sting is in the middle of his three observations. The Brazilian league is now by some distance the strongest in South America. Can Luis Suarez still tip the balance at this level? However many shirts he helps Gremio sell, the answer can only come on the pitch – and by scoring a first-half hat-trick on his debut in the 4-1 victory over Sao Luiz in he Recopa Gaucha in January, Suarez made an early statement of his intent.

Tim Vickery

Albania

Balkan nation hire former Arsenal, Barcelona and Brazil left-back Sylvinho as manager

Change is afoot for Albania. In January, the Albanian Football Association (FSHF) appointed the country's first-ever non-European manager, in ex-Arsenal, Barcelona and Corinthians left-back Sylvinho. The Brazilian brings with him fellow former Brazil international Doriva, who has managed a host of Brazilian clubs and worked with Sylvinho at Corinthians, with the duo also joined by former Argentina and Manchester City right-back Pablo Zabaleta in his first coaching role.

At surface level the appointment appears to represent a move away from the rigid defensive style that Albania have adopted over the past decade. It was an approach that served Gianni De Biasi well, as the Italian guided the Eagles to their first-ever major tournament at Euro 2016. His team was built with every player thinking defensively first: a 4-3-3 formation that transitioned into a 4-5-1 without the ball.

Another Italian, Christian Panucci, succeeded De Biasi. Yet by the tenure of the team's third successive Italian coach, Edoardo Reja, their defensive approach had been figured out by opponents, and no further major tournaments had been reached.

Opinion is divided on Reja. Under his stewardship, Albania had some disappointing results, failing to qualify for both Euro 2020 and Qatar 2022. In the latter, they were only two points away from a play-off spot in a group topped by England, but followed that campaign by failing to win a single game in the 2022-23 UEFA Nations League, avoiding relegation only by virtue of sharing a group with the disqualified Russia.

Reja would argue that he used the Nations League to blood a number of young talents that would be ready to compete for Euro 2024 qualification. But FSFH president Armand Duka saw it differently and, in November, Reja departed. After a two-month search for his replacement, Sylvinho signed an 18-month contract with a clear objective: qualifying for Germany 2024.

Although Sylvinho has vast experience as an assistant, working under Roberto Mancini at Internazionale and with Tite in the Brazilian national team, his managerial record leaves a lot to be desired. He was dismissed by Lyon after just 11 games, and was hugely unpopular during his time at Corinthians in his native Brazil.

The good news for Albania is that Sylvinho should show much more attacking intent and move away from Reja's tiresome 3-5-2 system, which proved unable to break down opposition defences.

Central to a new, more positive approach will be young Chelsea striker Armando Broja. When the 21-year-old returns from an ACL injury, he should provide the attacking impetus for a youthful Albania side that also includes promising Roma centre-back Marash Kumbulla (23), Inter midfielder Kristjan Asllani (20) and Empoli playmaker Nedim Bajrami (23). If Sylvinho can get them onboard, he will have a highly promising young squad at his disposal.

The mood amongst the Albanian supporters is one of intrigue. They are willing to get behind the inexperienced manager and his coaching staff for what looks like a competitive qualification group that Sylvinho described as "very balanced and complicated".

The campaign begins against Poland in March, with Moldova, Faroe Islands and Czech Republic to come, offering an opportunity that neither Sylvinho nor Albania can afford to waste.

Wilf MacDonnell

Albania boss... Sylvinho's last job was as manager of Corinthians

eyewitness

Alec McQuarrie reports

GREECE

The Athenian derby: more than a local rivalry

As the players of AEK Athens and Panathinaikos lined up ahead of their January meeting, a thick layer of smoke hung above the pitch, delaying the kick-off by ten minutes. Even after some of the smog had cleared, flares continued to illuminate the OPAP Arena throughout the match as the home supporters sought to create as fierce an atmosphere as possible. Pyrotechnics are a common sight in Greek football, but this game had more than most; the latest meeting of Athens' biggest clubs was more than just a local derby – it was a top-of-the-table clash.

The last time that the two sides finished in Greece's top two was in 1995-96. Usually, they are chasing Olympiakos, whose domination of the Greek Super League is hard to overstate. The Piraeus-based club have always been a heavyweight, winning 32 titles since the Alpha Ethniki began back in 1959. But 22 of those have come in the last 26 seasons; in each of the last three campaigns they have stormed to the title, with an average lead of 21 points.

But this season has been different. By mid-January Olympiakos sat third, seven points behind a rejuvenated Panathinaikos. The Greek champions have struggled in Europe too. After they were knocked out of Champions League qualifying by Maccabi Haifa of Israel, Olympiakos failed to win a single game in the Europa League group stage, a first in their history.

Pedro Martins, the club's longest-serving manager, was sacked after the galling 4-0 home defeat to Maccabi and his successor, Carlos Corberan, only lasted 49 days. The latest man in charge is Michel, a former Real Madrid midfielder, who previously managed the club before being sacked in 2015.

As well as managerial upheaval, the club has a severely bloated squad. In total 30 players have seen league minutes this season, while the high-profile summer signings have not worked out. Former Brazil and Real Madrid left-back Marcelo is yet to start a game, while Colombia's James Rodriguez would have hoped for more than three goals and four assists by the middle of January.

Yet while Olympiakos are labouring, the two teams at the top – AEK and Panathinaikos – are making huge strides both on and off the pitch.

The two Athenian clubs used to be the pre-eminent forces in ▸

Atmospheric...the OPAP Arena during the Athens derby
Credit: Alamy

Greek football, especially in the 1960s and early 1990s, between them winning 24 titles in 37 years. Panathinaikos in particular were a force to be reckoned with in Europe, famously beaten by Johan Cruyff's Ajax in the 1971 European Cup final, and going on to make the last four in 1985 and 1996.

AEK, meanwhile, had their most memorable campaign in the UEFA Cup 46 years ago, miraculously overturning a 3-0 first-leg deficit to beat Queens Park Rangers on penalties and reach the semi-finals, where they were vanquished by eventual champions Juventus.

Greek football as a whole peaked in the mid-noughties. As well as the national team's stunning triumph at Euro 2004, the league itself had three Champions League spots up for grabs – the same number as Germany's Bundesliga and France's Ligue 1.

But it soon came crashing down. Corruption scandals have not exactly been commonplace, but frequent enough that new controversies now provoke little more than an eye-roll. A prime example emerged in January with reports that Volos captain Jean Barrientos claimed he was offered €40,000 to get sent off in his side's 4-0 loss to Olympiakos.

"I wouldn't say it's 'normal'. It doesn't happen every week or every year," says *SPORT24* editor-in-chief Themis Kessaris. "But on the other hand, you have a sort of immunity to these things. Journalists and fans can no longer be shocked by news of corruption."

One of the biggest controversies came in 2008 when AEK topped the championship at the end of the season, only for Olympiakos to be awarded the title on a technicality. In their 1-0 defeat away to bottom-of-the-table Apollon Kalamaria, Austrian forward Roman Wallner started the match for the hosts. It later emerged that Wallner had already played for two clubs that season, Hamilton Academical and Falkirk, which meant he couldn't be registered as a Kalamaria player. Olympiakos appealed and were awarded the win that took them above AEK by one point.

But the problems in Greek football run a lot deeper than controversy and allegations of corruption. Persistent violence between ultra groups has prevented visiting supporters from attending derbies for over a decade. Sublime pyrotechnic displays ritually delay matches and firecrackers occasionally sever fingers. Attendances for matches not involving the top five clubs rarely break 3,000 and *Ethniki* (national team) hopefuls have limited opportunities if they stay in Greece. Greek nationals made up just 27.6 per cent of minutes played before the World Cup break, the lowest proportion of domestic participation in the top 20 European leagues.

For Kessaris, this is the biggest issue of them all: "I never thought I'd be saying it, but we've got to the point where the Greek national manager goes to a derby to watch Greek players and no Greek players are playing. It's about identifying with somebody you watch from a young age. That's what we're hugely missing right now."

But *gazzetta.gr* journalists Dimitris Vergos and Dimitris Tomaras share a different view regarding the most immediate area of concern: the facilities. The national team, currently ranked 51st in the world, do not have a central training centre and, before this season

Athens derby...AEK's Nordin Amrabat is fouled during the clash against Panathinaikos
Credit: Alamy

Underwhelming... Marcelo arrived at Olympiakos to huge fanfare

began, only Olympiakos had a stadium with a capacity larger than 30,000.

Thankfully, this is where Greek football finally has something to celebrate. AEK Athens' spiritual home in a northern suburb of the capital was demolished in 2003 and for 20 years they were forced to play at the oversized Olympic Stadium. A ground befitting the 12-time league champions was eventually unveiled at the end of September – nine years after plans were initially released.

The two-tier 32,500-seater OPAP Arena is the biggest football-only stadium in Greece, built in the exact location their beloved Nikos Goumas stood for 73 years. Its design and original name take inspiration from the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, a nod to the formation of the club by Greek refugees from Constantinople after the Greco-Turkish population exchange of 1923.

The return has been a roaring success and results have reflected the wave of optimism sweeping the club. Their seventh win from seven at the "Agia Sophia" (ten out of ten by mid-January) felt like an exorcism of two decades of broken promises and perennial delays, not least because it came against unbeaten Panathinaikos. The two clubs have been diametrically opposed to one another since the very beginning. Though political differences have softened, AEK have always leaned left in honour of their refugee roots, while Panathinaikos have history as a bourgeoisie club.

Match winner...Orbelin Pineda scores AEK's winner *Credit: Instagram @aekfc_official*

The game itself was billed as a title decider, and although many suspected AEK's direct, high-pressing brand of football would overcome Panathinaikos' impenetrable defence, the match was settled by a freak incident. In the 66th minute a firecracker exploded metres away from visiting goalkeeper Alberto Brignoli while AEK were on the attack. The Italian was thrown to the floor and once he recovered, AEK didn't hesitate to test his reflexes. Four touches after the restart, Orbelin Pineda lashed the ball through Brignoli's legs from a seemingly impossible angle and the OPAP erupted, quite literally. A sea of flares engulfed the stadium in smoke and, just like kick-off, the game was delayed for ten minutes while it cleared.

While Olympiakos are labouring, the two teams at the top – AEK and Panathinaikos – are making huge strides both on and off the pitch

It was enough to give AEK a famous 1-0 win and cut the gap to the leaders down to four points. Three days later, their infectious Argentine manager Matias Almeyda extended his contract until 2028. According to AEK reporter Vergos, this current side is even better than the one that ended a 24-year wait for the title in 2018. The good times are well and truly back in Nea Philadelpheia, a decade after financial mismanagement saw them drop down to the third tier of Greek football.

And Panathinaikos have cause for optimism too. Not only is this their best start to a campaign for 28 years, but they are also planning a much-needed change of scenery. Their current ground, the weather-beaten Leoforos Alexandras, celebrated its 100th birthday last year and its 15,000 seats are hardly sufficient to accommodate their vast following.

Barely 3km west of the Acropolis is an area called Votanikos, a cluster of derelict factories, dilapidated warehouses and rubbish dumps. A double-pronged regeneration effort – similar to the one completed in Stratford, London, for the 2012 Olympics – will see Panathinaikos get a 35,000-capacity stadium, complete with a new basketball court and swimming pool. The entire area will be transformed, with eco-friendly office buildings set in 17km squad of green space. What's more the ambitious project, due to be completed in 2026, has the backing of both Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Mayor of Athens Kostas Bakoyannis.

This could be seen as world-ending news for Olympiakos and their fan base, but *Thrylos* expert Tomaras says this is exactly what Greek football needs. With Olympiakos' exit from the Europa League this season, Greece has no representative in the knockout stages of any European competition for the first time in 17 years. The league's UEFA coefficient ranking in 2020-21 (20th) was the lowest for three decades (now 19th). Olympiakos can only do so much on their own and the re-emergence of Panathinaikos and AEK will serve to strengthen the league's standing in Europe.

More importantly, fans up and down the country are relishing the play-offs. There is palpable excitement that a four-way title race could go down to the wire. There is life in Greek football again.

eyewitness

Steve Menary reports

SWITZERLAND

Vying for supremacy

The Swiss city of Lausanne is home to two competing multi-club owners

ABOVE LEFT: Britain's richest man...Lausanne-Sport owner Jim Ratcliffe
ABOVE RIGHT: Low profile...Stade Lausanne Ouchy owner Vartan Sirmakes

It's derby day in the Swiss city of Lausanne. Inside the Stade Olympique de la Pontaise, Stade Lausanne Ouchy's hardy ultras are being drowned out by their rivals from Lausanne-Sport, but on the pitch the city's smaller club look a better bet for promotion this season.

Lausanne lies on the shores of Geneva and, when it comes to sport, is more usually associated with the Olympics, with the headquarters of the International Olympic Committee located in the city. The two local football teams are less high profile, playing in the country's second tier. SLO only turned full-time four years ago but go into the Swiss Challenge League game in third place, six points and one place ahead of Lausanne-Sport.

At one level, the game is a derby between Lausanne's two biggest clubs, and a key clash in the race for promotion. But it is also a contest between two extremely rich men and their differing approaches to club ownership. In Lausanne-Sport's corner is Britain's richest man, Sir Jim Ratcliffe, while leading SLO is Swiss watchmaker Vartan Sirmakes. Both have developed a portfolio of interests in multiple clubs with differing strategies.

Multi-club ownership is growing in Switzerland. Thun are controlled by one of the largest MCO groups, Pacific Media, and Lugano's owner Joe Mansueto also controls Chicago Fire in MLS, while lower-league side FC Biel-Benne is part of Core Sports. In 2020, a 90 per cent stake in Grasshopper Zurich was bought by Jenny Wang, whose husband Guo Guangchang controls English Premier League side Wolverhampton Wanderers.

Ratcliffe and Sirmakes control the three other Swiss clubs involved in MCO but their approaches and track record differ widely.

As well as Lausanne-Sport, Ratcliffe owns Nice in France's Ligue 1, expressed an interest in buying Chelsea last year and is in the running to take over the club he grew up supporting, Manchester United. Ratcliffe made his personal fortune from chemicals company INEOS, which he founded in 1998. Now aged 70, Ratcliffe has also built up a remarkable sporting portfolio over the past five years.

In 2018 he teamed up with Sir Ben Ainslie and reportedly invested £110 million in a sailing team to compete for the America's Cup. A year later he took over the Team Sky cycling team, which now races as INEOS Grenadiers, and has won the Tour de France and Giro d'Italia. Ratcliffe also owns a third of the Mercedes Formula One motor-racing team, but (so far) his investment in football has been low profile and less successful.

INEOS moved its headquarters from the UK to Lausanne in 2010 and in 2017 the company bought Lausanne-Sport, a club with seven Swiss titles to its name, although none since 1965.

Two years later, Ratcliffe spent a reported €100m to buy Nice with

Ultras...Lausanne-Sport supporters watch their team during the derby

co-owners Andy Currie and John Reece. More than €70m has been spent in conjunction with the City of Lausanne turning Lausanne's Stade de la Tuiliere into a smart 12,500-capacity football-only venue. So far the progress at both clubs has been slow and inconsistent.

At Lausanne, the club won the Swiss Challenge League and promotion to the Super League under local coach Giorgio Contini in 2020, but were relegated in 2021-22 after finishing bottom. Nice have finished fifth, ninth and fifth in Ligue 1 in the last three seasons, and reached last season's French Cup final. They are mid-table this season, although the recent signings of Aaron Ramsey, Kasper Schmeichel, Ross Barkley, and Nicolas Pepe and Terem Moffi (both on loan) demonstrate the club's ambition.

INEOS' football expansion also included plans to build academies in Botswana, Tanzania and Rwanda only for these to be cancelled in 2021. Instead, the club has developed a partnership with Racing Abidjan in Ivory Coast to help develop players.

"We are going to try new things and we will do things differently," Ratcliffe said at the opening of the club's newly-renovated stadium in 2020. "All may not be successful but we will try. Again and again."

The clubs backed by INEOS are, according to its website, expected to be "sustainable franchises" that "must also excel on their commercial activities." INEOS adds: "It is expected that whilst the clubs are run federally like any other INEOS business they will work together to optimise opportunities. This can be expected to encompass: scouting, player assessment and acquisitions as well as medical and fitness."

Lausanne-Sport are the best-supported club in the Challenge League this season, averaging crowds of 4,308 before the derby, almost 3,000 more than SLO.

SLO say they are not looking to emulate their rivals, with their head of sponsorships and partnerships, Rawid Yunus, saying: "There's no particular interest to build a multi-club business."

There's a bitter irony there as Sirmakes' portfolio is enjoying more success this season. In addition to SLO he also owns another Swiss side, Stade Nyonnais, who are in the running for promotion from the third tier, and

Lausanne-Sport...a flag inside the stadium

French club Martigues who are on track for back-to-back promotions and a return to Ligue 2 for the first time in two decades.

A hat-trick of promotions this season would be a remarkable return for Sirmakes, the son of Armenian jewellers, who was born in Istanbul and moved to Geneva at the age of 18. He later went into business with Swiss jeweller Franck Muller and the pair founded a high-end watchmaking business, taking his partner's name.

Franck Muller watches reportedly cost an average of €38,000 apiece and are worn by a host of well-known names from Cristiano Ronaldo, David Beckham and Jose Mourinho to Arnold Schwarzenegger and Elton John. When Italian mafia don Matteo Messina Denaro was finally captured earlier this year after decades on the run, he was also reputedly wearing a Franck Muller watch.

Sirmakes' journey into football club ownership began in the land of his parents at FC Ararat. The Armenian club have a long history, winning the old Soviet Top League in 1973 and reaching the European Cup quarter-finals in 1974-75. Armenian club football has fallen on hard times and Sirmakes took control of FC Ararat as he was investing in other businesses in Armenia.

Like Ratcliffe, Sirmakes does not court the media and rarely attends SLO matches. The club says it does not even have any photos of Sirmakes, whose football investment outside of Armenia has been relatively recent.

SLO's origins date back to 1901 and the formation of Signal Lausanne, which

Walk out...the players emerge for the start of the match

merged 25 years later with Cercle des Sports to form Stade Lausanne Ouchy. The club were playing in the regional leagues until 2014 but reached the third tier in 2017 and won the title two years later, when Sirmakes took control.

The club rents the 16,000-capacity Stade Olympique de la Pontaise (which, incidentally, was Lausanne-Sport's home until 2020) from the local municipality, and promotion to the Super League was not a target for head coach Anthony Braizat when he joined from Stade Nyonnais last summer.

Braizat had developed a successful team at Stade Nyonnais, but the club could not play in the same league as SLO. Knowing promotion was impossible, Stade Nyonnais ran out of steam last season and Braizat shifted clubs.

Unlike many MCO groups, players are not brought in from Sirmakes' other clubs. Braizat's squad is sourced from the Swiss lower leagues and abroad and captained by Lavdrim Hajrulahu, who failed to make the breakthrough at Lausanne-Sport earlier in his career. Hajrulahu is one of a number of Kosovans in Braizat's multi-national squad, which also includes players from Angola, Iran, the Comoros, Senegal, Ivory Coast and neighbouring France.

> "We are going to try new things and we will do things differently. All may not be successful but we will try. Again and again"
>
> **Lausanne-Sport owner Sir Jim Ratcliffe**

Prior to the derby, Braizat had given more game time to overseas players (47 per cent of matches) than any other side in the Challenge League, according to research by CIES Sports Intelligence.

Lausanne-Sport are also heavily reliant on overseas footballers, and 44 per cent of game time has gone to foreign players, but SLO has the second-oldest team in the Challenge League at 26.4 years, compared to 24.7 years at Lausanne-Sport, who have the second-youngest.

With the Super League expanding next campaign, the top two clubs will be promoted this season and the third-place team goes into a play-off with the bottom-placed team from the league above. "Nothing is granted in this difficult league; we live day by day and keep our heads down to work [but] there are more chances to get promoted this season," says Yunus.

SLO start the derby in control. Zachary Hadji stabs home following a goalmouth scramble after just 14 minutes to put SLO ahead and their small band of ultras light a solitary flare.

Lausanne-Sport hit back as SLO goalkeeper Niklas Steffen fluffs a clearance and the lively Japanese forward Toichi Suzuki slots home. The response shows that the majority of the crowd back the visitors, who go into the break a goal up after Dominik Schwizer buries a rebound.

An early second-half goal from Suzuki puts Lausanne-Sport in total control and, though Hajrulahu narrows the deficit, a stoppage-time goal from Schwizer clinches a 4-2 win for visiting coach Ludovic Magnin, although his side remain outside the play-offs.

The Challenge League season has plenty of time to run and Ratcliffe has proved a patient owner, but Sirmakes could yet still finish this season as the most successful football club owner in Lausanne.

BELOW LEFT: Match-winner...Toichi Suzuki scored a brace for Lausanne-Sport

BELOW RIGHT: Victorious... Lausanne-Sport players celebrate their derby win

eyewitness

Ben Bocsak reports

GEORGIA

The talent of Tbilisi

Integral figure...Dinamo Tbilisi's academy director Andres Carrasco

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, Georgia has produced a handful of exciting players – from Georgi Kinkladze at Manchester City, to Kakha Kaladze at Milan and Shota Arveladze at Ajax and Rangers – but the current generation of breakthrough talent is undoubtedly the most exciting.

The current national team has only lost one of their last 12 matches – a friendly defeat to Morocco ahead of the World Cup – and won five out of six games in their Nations League campaign to earn promotion to League B, which will move them a step closer to reaching their first-ever major tournament. With the national team's average age just 26.4 years old, this is only the beginning; Georgia has a team for the future, and evidence of that can be found at Dinamo Tbilisi.

The club are the current national champions, lifting the title in December with a squad that had an average age of 22.9 years old. In Georgia's Nations League clash with Gibraltar in September, half of their squad came through Dinamo's academy, including the likes of Khvicha Kvaratskhelia of Napoli and Valencia goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili.

The club has always been one of the country's greatest sides and even lifted the UEFA Cup Winners' Cup back in 1981. However, Dinamo's pioneering success at the academy level is quite recent.

The seeds were planted just over a decade ago when the club hired Andres Carrasco as academy director. Carrasco came with a high pedigree, having spent over a decade at Barcelona's *La Masia*, witnessing the rise of Lionel Messi and the rest of the club's golden generation of academy products.

"I worked at Barcelona for 13 years but then, in 2011, I was looking for an adventure outside of Spain and I came to Dinamo," Carrasco tells *World Soccer*.

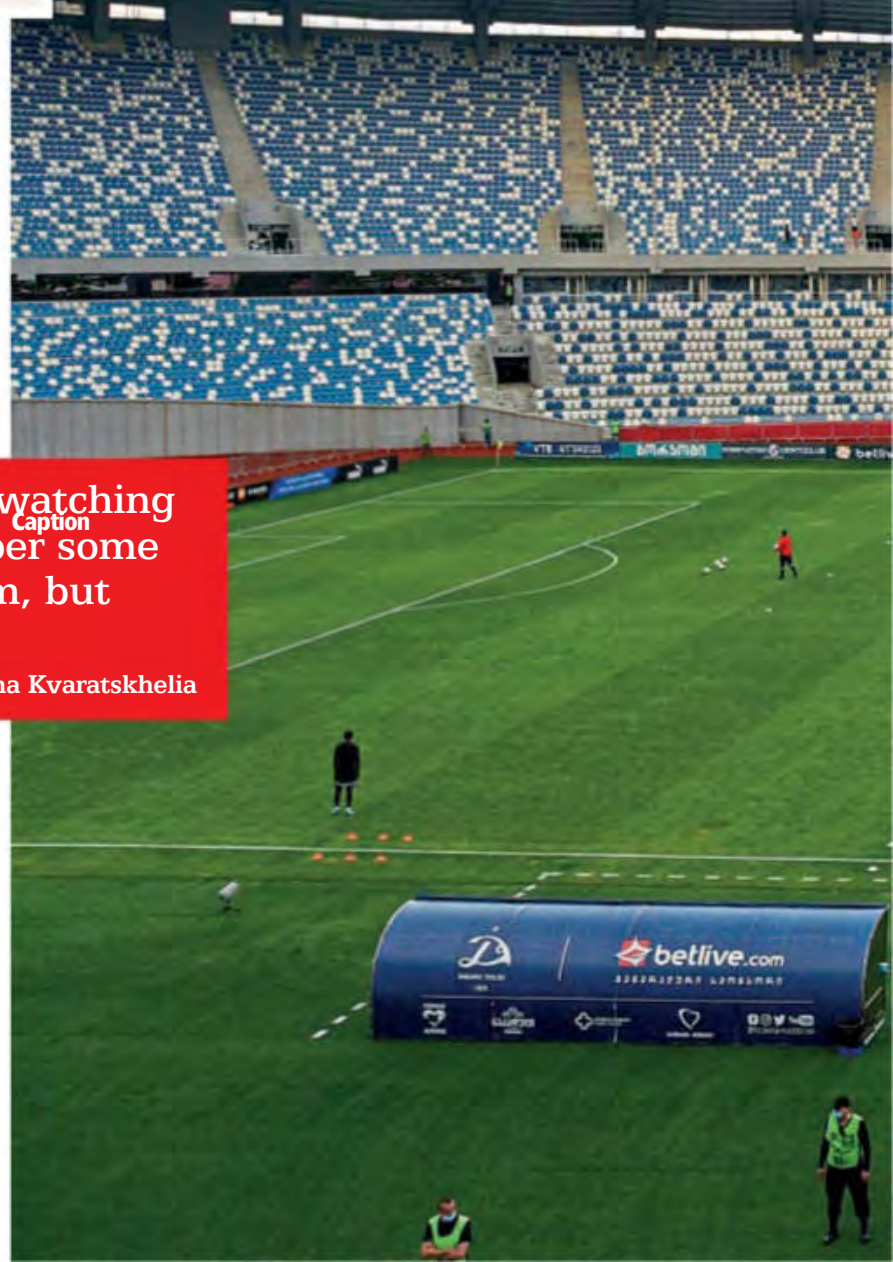
"When I came here, Dinamo didn't have an academy, and we started from zero. We didn't have facilities; we didn't have coaches, so we started building straightaway."

Despite the work that needed to be done, even early on, Carrasco saw exciting potential. Not long after his arrival at Dinamo, the club spotted a ten-year-old Kvaratskhelia, who immediately caught Carrasco's eye.

"I remember that day when we were watching him play [for the first time]. I remember some coaches were having doubts about him, but I was sure he had something special.

"He was always very skinny and looked like he could dissemble at any moment, but he made it very difficult for the defenders. I would say he

> "I remember that day when we were watching him play [for the first time]. I remember some coaches were having doubts about him, but I was sure he had something special"
>
> **Dinamo Tbilisi academy director Andres Carrasco on Khvicha Kvaratskhelia**



looked quite similar to how he is now. That's the great thing about these types of players – it was the same with Messi. He played the same when he was young. Even against older age groups, Khvicha was beating players all the time. He was brave in one-v-ones and he had that smartness to find the pass no one could see."

In order to aid Kvaratskhelia and his fellow academy graduates' development, Carrasco implemented methods he had mastered at *La Masia*.

"Our philosophy was and has been 4-3-3 with nice attacking football, pressing and counter-pressing, playing out from the back.

"We train very similar to what we were developing in Barcelona, not only training but game style as w ll – with slight differences because the Georgian player is not the same player as the Spanish player – but we try to play enjoyable football."

In the early months, Carrasco sent three of his *protégés* on trial to Barca to gauge the level of talent he had at his disposal. To his surprise, the trials proved to be a major success.

ABOVE: Star graduates...Khvicha Kvaratskhelia (left) and Giorgi Mamardashvili (right)

BELOW: Boris Paichadze Dinamo Arena...Dinamo Tbilisi's 54,000-seater home stadium

"After four or five months we got three players on trial at Barcelona, and they wanted to sign the two younger players. One was [Giorgi] Chakvetadze [now a regular for Georgia's national team].

"In the end, because of FIFA regulations, we could not make it happen. But that moment made me realise our players in Georgia were so good they could compete even at the highest level."

None of Carrasco's players have made it to Barcelona so far, but Dinamo Tbilisi's academy graduates have signed for the likes of Porto, Bayern Munich, Napoli and Valencia in the last two years alone, and their subsequent success on the global scene has certainly increased the appetite for Georgian players

Champions...Dinamo Tbilisi celebrate after winning the 2022 title

among Europe's elite. The interest does not surprise Carrasco.

"A Georgian player still has that street footballer in him and the individual skills to make unpredictable solutions, that's what makes them special," Carrasco explains.

"All these players like Kvaratskhelia or [current Dinamo 17-year-old] Luka Parkadze, they are unpredictable and they are great in one-v-one situations. They play a lot on the streets and in games outside training because they live for football and that makes them perfect for the modern game."

It's not just their innate ability that has helped the likes of Kvaratskhelia. The club's academy graduates have a clear pathway into senior football, at a competitive level in a team that competes for the league title every year in Georgia. That experience helps them adapt to the demands of adult football at an early age and puts them ahead of their peers.

The likes of Kvaratskhelia, Mamardashvili, as well as Bayern Munich-bound Parkadze, have all benefitted from being exposed to senior football as teenagers in the country's first division.

"Around 60-70 per cent of our first team came from our academy," Carrasco says proudly. "We are not scared to promote players."

Promotion, however, is not merely present in the first team. Even at academy level, Dinamo's youngsters regularly play an age group above in order to make them more competitive and to ensure their development never stagnates.

"All of our players, in every age group, compete one year older; our Under-10s compete in the Under-11s league and so on," Carrasco explains.

"The competition needs to be better for us, so the players that we like, we promote them as well. We have players in the Under-19s who are just 16, and in the Under-17s we also have Under-15 players. This is one of our strengths; to analyse players individually and promote them if they are ready for the next level so they don't get too comfortable."

Carrasco's adventures after establishing solid foundations at Dinamo have seen him traverse Europe, working at Shakhtar Donetsk, but he returned to Dinamo Tbilisi in January 2022 to continue his project with the club.

"Now that I am back, you can see that, okay, we are missing a few things, but our philosophy has remained the same and even a few coaches are still here from that period."

Bayern Munich-bound...Luka Parkadze in action for Georgia Under-17s

Still extremely early in the academy's metamorphosis, the successful beginning fills Carrasco with hope of even more to come.

"Before we set up the academy here in Dinamo, the football was not very structured, so all the talent was misguided, and maybe they weren't always supported by proper football knowledge and game understanding.

"I think these ten years have been really progressive. But in terms of academies, we are still quite young. These first ten years were just the start. There are a lot of players coming up who will have an even bigger impact in the national team.

"When I see our young players in the Under-13s, Under-14s, Under-15s and Under-16s, I can see maybe two or three players who I believe can make an impact at a top five European league from every age group."

Carrasco knows players like Kvaratskhelia are rare, but he is optimistic that there will be others among his current prospects who can emulate his former *protégé's* achievements.

> **"He is so smart and so fast; you would not believe how good he is. Probably not even Barcelona have players like this"**
>
> **Carrasco on Dinamo's next top prospect**

"I think we have players now who are better than [Kvaratskhelia] at the same age. We have an Under-13 player who plays in the Under-15s and he beats players like they are mannequins. He is so smart and so fast; you would not believe how good he is. Probably not even Barcelona have players like this. But he needs to grow, and his family needs to support him the right way. Our goal is to help him fulfil his potential."

Looking ahead, the ambition is to achieve more of the same by continuing to produce players who can make an impact, not only at Dinamo Tbilisi, but also among Europe's elite and thus help Georgia progress as a nation.

"We are always working to get as many players into our first team as possible because that helps them grow. After that, the player must take charge of their own development. We also want to transfer as many as possible in the right moments. I am confident we will see many more Georgian players around the world and many more successes for Dinamo Tbilisi and the national team."

In the next ten years, with Georgia having already shown a glimmer of the nation's exciting potential, Carrasco's words could prove prophetic, and much of that will be down to the work at Dinamo Tbilisi.

New campaign...action from last season's LOI Premier League clash between Shamrock Rovers and Bohemians

eyewitness

Sean Creedon reports

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Shamrock Rovers chasing history

Chasing history...Shamrock Rovers boss Stephen Bradley

Shamrock Rovers will be bidding to make it four titles in a row when the League of Ireland Premier Division season kicks-off on February 17.

The Hoops have achieved that feat once before, between 1984 and 1987, when they established themselves as the most successful team in the country. Yet within a year of that title they had lost their home ground, Glenmalure Park, and their place at the top of the Irish game. For the following 22 years, the Hoops played their home games at various Dublin venues until finally securing a lease on the new Tallaght Stadium in 2009.

During their nomadic period, Rovers only won the league once, in 1993-94, but returned to winning ways once they had a permanent home. In their second season in Tallaght, the Hoops won their 16th league title under current Northern Ireland boss, Michael O'Neill, and last season lifted their 20th.

Much of the credit for Rovers' recent success goes to manager Stephen Bradley. Unlike their previous haul of four titles in a row, which were won under two different coaches – Jim McLaughlin and Dermot Keely – the 38-year-old ex-Arsenal apprentice has been the brains behind all of the three latest successes. Born just two miles from Tallaght Stadium, Bradley is close to making history at his hometown club.

After a successful playing career, Bradley was appointed Rovers boss in November 2016, a few days before his 32nd birthday. In his early days in charge the Hoops couldn't keep up with Dundalk and Cork City, who dominated the league. But Rovers finally reached the summit in the COVID-interrupted 2020 season when they went through the truncated league campaign unbeaten. In 2021 they finished with a 16-point lead over second place, and last season the winning margin was 13 points.

Their superiority is undeniable, and Bradley is aware of the weight of expectations on his shoulders.

"It would be a special achievement for the players and everybody at the club, including myself, if we manage to win four-in-a-row," he said. "We know that clubs like Dundalk, Derry and St Patrick's will be pushing us hard, but we have to remain hungry and focused.

"By May or June we hope the new fourth stand at Tallaght Stadium will be completed and then we will be able to accommodate crowds of up to 10,000 at home games on a regular basis."

Rovers have lost three players from last season – Aidomo Emakhu to Millwall, Andy Lyons to Blackpool and ex-Burnley and Wigan midfielder Chris McCann, who returned to live in England – but have signed three replacements. Liam Burt arrived from Bohemians, Trevor Clarke re-joined the club on loan from Bristol Rovers after moving to England in 2019, and former Sligo Rovers forward Johnny Kenny arrived on loan from Celtic.

"We have lost three, but I am very happy with the players we have signed," said Bradley. "I like Johnny and tried to get him a few years back. He knows the league very well. In this team, with the chances we create and the way he plays, I think Johnny will score goals for us."

Bradley's impressive work has been recognised across the Irish Sea. Last season, he received an offer from English League One club Lincoln City, which he turned down.

Europa Conference League...Shamrock Rovers line up ahead of their meeting with Ferencvaros

> "I make no secret of the fact that I would love to manage in another country at a different level – that's a real ambition of mine""
>
> **Shamrock Rovers manager Stephen Bradley**

"I wasn't happy that news of the Lincoln offer got into the media, but when it did I had to deal with it. At that stage I thought Rovers had a good chance of qualifying for the group stage of the Europa Conference League, which we did. I took a bit of gamble, but I wanted to test myself.

"I hope I don't regret turning down the Lincoln offer. I make no secret of the fact that I would love to manage in another country at a different level – that's a real ambition of mine."

Dundalk manager... Stephen O'Donnell

Last season's runners-up, Derry City, improved significantly in Ruaidhri Higgins' first full season in charge, and the manager was happy with the Candystripes' improvement. A former Derry player, Higgins left his role as opposition analyst for the national team to re-join the club in April 2021, and guided the side to a top-two finish for the first time in 16 years, and victory in the FAI Cup.

That was Derry's sixth FAI Cup win, and they have also won the League Cup a record 11 times, yet they have only won the league twice, the last being in 1997. "We are really just focused on our own performances and overall improvement and not worried about toppling Rovers," says Higgins.

Level with Derry on 66 points last season were Dundalk. Their manager

Stephen O'Donnell, who controversially joined them after helping St Patrick's win the FAI Cup in 2021, assembled a new squad at Oriel Park and they gelled well together. They lost Lewis Macari, grandson of the legendary Lou Macari, who has returned to Stoke City following a loan spell. But O'Donnell is hoping to announce a few new signings before kick-off.

He said: "We were not involved in Europe last season, but we will be in the Europa Conference League this season. It's good to see that the league is trying to ease the fixture pressure on the clubs playing in Europe by having a few extra round of midweek games in May before the European season gets underway.

"It's going to be difficult for anybody to stop Rovers making if four in a row. But in this league, everybody is capable of taking points off each other."

St Patrick's Athletic manager Tim Clancy says he was happy to retain most of his squad from last season, but promises Saints fans a few new faces before kick-off.

Clancy, who spent most of his playing career in Scotland with Kilmarnock, Motherwell, Hibernian and St Johnstone, began his managerial career with Drogheda United and joined St Pat's last season. Upon arriving, Clancy has bolstered his front line with experienced striker Eoin Doyle from Bolton Wanderers, who returned to his home country after nearly 12 years playing in Scotland and England.

"Eoin will be 35 in March, but he was our top scorer with 14 goals last season and there was only one player in the league who scored more [Aidan Keena with Sligo]. Apart from his goalscoring, Eoin gives encouragement and support to the younger squad members."

Apart from Shelbourne manager Damien Duff, who won 100 Irish caps, Cork City manager Colin Healy is the only other current domestic manager to have been capped at senior level for the Republic of Ireland, winning 13 caps alongside a club career with the likes of Celtic, Sunderland, Barnsley and Ipswich Town. He finished his career with his hometown club and was appointed manager in December 2020, shortly after the club had been relegated from the Premier Division. Now, after winning the First Division last season, Cork are back in the top flight.

"I retired as a player in 2016, so I missed out on City winning the league-cup double in 2017, " said Healy. "We are the only Premier Division club in Cork, and we have no trouble attracting decent crowds of around 6,000 when we are going well."

Until recently, Cork were owned by supporters group FORAS (Friends of the Rebel Army Society), but were taken over by businessman Dermot Usher in December.

"It's good to have a new owner on board and hopefully it will give us stability," said Healy. "But I'm very grateful to FORAS, who were very supportive of me for the past two years."

Meanwhile, there will be a new name in the First Division after Kerry FC joined the league. Kerry has traditionally been a strong Gaelic football county, but has had a football team competing in the League of Ireland's youth divisions in recent years. Now, a senior team will compete in the second tier at Mounthawk Park in the town of Tralee, initially on a fully amateur basis with a focus on developing young talent.

With the addition of Kerry it means that 17 of the 26 counties that make up the Republic of Ireland have now had a league team at some stage.

Runners-up...Derry City also won the FAI Cup in 2022

PREMIER DIVISION 2023

BOHEMIANS
Manager: Declan Devine
The only ever-present members of the top flight, taking part in the inaugural 1921 season. Waiting for Dublin City Council to complete the upgrade of their home ground, Dalymount Park. Their 11th (and last) league title win came in 2009.

CORK CITY
Manager: Colin Healy
Back in the Premier Division after a two-year absence. Between 2010 and 2022 the club was run by its supporters' trust, until Dublin businessman Dermot Usher took over in December.

DERRY CITY
Manager: Ruaidhri Higgins
Played in Northern Ireland until 1971 and joined the new League of Ireland First Division in 1985-86, before being promoted to the Premier Divison the following year. The Candystripes took their colours from Sheffield United, who were captained in 1925 by Donegal-born Billy Gillespie.

DROGHEDA UNITED
Manager: Kevin Doherty
Used to be known as "the Boynesiders" after the River Boyne that flows through the town, now more commonly nicknamed "the Drogs". Won just one Premier Division title in their 104-year history, in 2007.

DUNDALK
Manager: Stephen O'Donnell
First club from outside Dublin to win the league (1932-33), and now the second-most successful side in the league's history with 14 Premier Division titles. Enjoyed domestic and European success under current Republic of Ireland boss Stephen Kenny.

ST PATRICK'S ATHLETIC
Manager: Tim Clancy
The Saints play at the compact Richmond Park on the banks of the Camac River in Inchicore, Dublin. Nine-time champions, it is the club where former Manchester United, Aston Villa and Republic of Ireland defender Paul McGrath started his career.

SHAMROCK ROVERS
Manager: Stephen Bradley
Rovers were founded in Ringsend in 1899 and made their home in Milltown. They have won a record 20 league titles – including each of the last three – and the FAI Cup a record 25 times. Sold Gavin Bazunu to Manchester City in 2019.

SHELBOURNE
Manager: Damien Duff
A proposed move to Dalymount to ground-share with neighbours Bohemians is off, so the Reds are now planning to develop Tolka Park. Founded in Ringsend in 1895, they won their 13th title in 2006, but 2023 will be only their fifth season in the top flight since.

SLIGO ROVERS
Manager:John Russell
Rovers have a history of recruiting English players and managers. Dixie Dean played for the club in the 1939 FAI Cup final, while former managers include ex-Northern Ireland bosses Lawrie Sanchez and Ian Baraclough.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
Manager: Andy Myler
Something of a yo-yo club, the Students joined the league in 1979 and have been relegated to the first division six times. Returned to the top flight for the 2022 campaign and stayed up after beating Waterford 1-0 in a play-off.

Aerial view... Como's Stadio Giuseppe Sinigaglia

eyewitness

Emanuele Giulianelli reports

ITALY

Italy's richest club

Which Italian club has the richest owners? No, not Juventus, Milan or Internazionale, nor even Silvio Berlusconi's Monza. Surprisingly, the correct answer is Como, the Serie B club that has been under the control of Indonesian brothers Robert Budi Hartono and Michael Bambang Hartono since 2019.

When the Hartono brothers arrived, the club from Lombardy was in Serie D, the fourth level of Italian football and highest non-professional league, ▸

Billionaire owner...Michael Bambang Hartono

rebuilding after a tragic bankruptcy that almost erased a club that has competed in Serie A 13 times. They finished as high as sixth place in 1949-50, and spent five consecutive years in the top flight during the 1980s. In 2002, they became the first Italian team in history to achieve back-to-back promotions from Serie C to Serie A. Yet they only lasted one season, and have not returned to the top flight since.

On April 4 2019, the headline of local newspaper *La Provincia di Como* read: "Como speaks foreign", announcing that the club had been purchased by a London-based media company called SENT Entertainment Ltd, with Michael Gandler – a former revenue office at Internazionale – as managing director. But soon it was clear that, behind that company, was the Indonesian tobacco giant Djarum, owned by the Hartono brothers.

"SENT and Como 1907 are a perfect combination," said Gandler. "Como has a past, a tradition, a presence in the area with a unique value. The spectacle and the support that Como brings every time it takes the field represent something truly special for us who work in the entertainment sector".

Como is famous throughout Italy. The 19th-century novel *The Betrothed* by Alessandro Manzoni is known by every Italian student, and begins with a description of the lake: "That branch of the lake of Como, which extends towards the south, is enclosed by two unbroken chains of mountains, which, as they advance and recede, diversify its shores with numerous bays and inlets". It is a passage that is familiar to the entire nation, with the novel a staple of high-school curriculums. Meanwhile, the shores of the lake are home to a number of extravagant celebrities' villas, with George Clooney, Richard Branson and Muse frontman Matt Bellamy among the famous names to be convinced by the unique beauty of the lake and its surroundings.

All this helps to explain why such wealthy men as the Hartono brothers were attracted to buy the club. "The city of Como is famous all over the world and is of an incomparable beauty," says Gandler. "Our goal is to associate Como 1907 with the city and also ensure that the football club is recognised and respected globally."

Since 1963, the Hartono brothers have been the owners of the tobacco multinational Djarum (which they inherited from their father), famous for the production of flavoured cigarettes. Since the 1990s though, this has just been one branch of their business. In 1997, they managed to buy the majority stake of Indonesia's most important private bank, Bank Central Asia, after the outbreak of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Since then they have bought supermarket chains, film production houses and streaming services.

According to the April 2022 edition of *Forbes* magazine, the two brothers are the 64th and 69th wealthiest men on the planet. The total value of their assets is $45.4 billion, figures that place the Hartonos in a different stratosphere to any other football club owners in Italy; Berlusconi's assets, for example, have been calculated at $7.1 bn.

"The best result was seeing people's trust grow day by day," says Gandler. "We arrived in a general climate of distrust, due to what happened with the previous foreign ownership and it was normal that at the beginning we too were perceived with suspicion. Then those wary looks turned into smiles and pats on the back".

Hero's welcome... Fabregas is greeted by Como supporters

The club was declared bankrupt under the previous ownership in 2017, and were forced to rebuild from scratch in Serie D for the 2017-18 season.

Yet rebuild they did, and sufficiently enough to attract new investment. Como ended the 2018-19 campaign not only with new owners, but also heading into a new division, having sealed promotion to Serie C by winning Serie D.

Their first season back in full-time professional football passed by relatively anonymously, achieving a comfortable mid-table finish. The bigger changes were coming off the pitch; by the start of the 2020-21 campaign, they had a new sports director in Carlalberto Ludi, a new manager in former player and assistant coach Giacomo Gattuso, and a new managing director: the former Chelsea and England midfielder Dennis Wise, who replaced Gandler and took charge of all football matters. Mirwan Suwarso provided the link between the Indonesian owners and rest of the board.

"We have utmost faith in our head of football, Dennis Wise, and in our director of football, Carlalberto Ludi, not only to continue to improve the results of the first team, but also

to build our future," said the president of the club's board of directors. Soon afterwards, the club's progress continued as they won the third-tier Serie C and went up to Serie B.

Another safe, mid-table finish was secured in 2021-22, with striker Alberto Cerri the star with ten league goals. Yet by the following summer, the 26-year-old striker had been replaced as the club's main attraction.

News of Cesc Fabregas' arrival was initially dismissed as fake news when Italian websites and newspapers first started to report that the former Spanish World Cup winner, one of the most recognised footballers in the world, had decided to sign for a Serie B side like Como.

"Como has a long-term project and it was exactly what I wanted," said Fabregas to those questioning his choice. "Credit goes to Dennis who made me seize this opportunity. MLS wasn't in my plans, I wanted to stay in Europe, where the level is higher; money has never been an important component for me".

Fabregas arrived as a free agent, followed by other big names like Patrick Cutrone, formerly of Milan, Fiorentina, Valencia and Wolverhampton Wanderers, Nicholas Ioannou from Nottingham Forrest, and one-time Italian international Daniele Baselli, among others.

> "Como has a long-term project and it was exactly what I wanted"
> **Cesc Fabregas**

Project is the keyword in the Hartonos' plan. They are the richest owners in Italian football, but they are not following the lead of Monza, the team that went up to Serie A last season thanks to Berlusconi's investment. Como insist that theirs is a serious plan to build a functional team, not make crazy investments. Of course the plan is to reach Serie A, but to arrive in a position to stick around, rather than come straight back down again.

Central to these plans is the renovation of the Stadio Giuseppe Sinigaglia, which is situated in one of the most beautiful locations in Italy, right on the banks of the lake. A potential investment of €40m has been suggested, as well as the building of a new cutting-edge training centre, merchandising, and the global expansion of the Como brand.

"There is one point that remains fixed: we will engage with this club and in this city for as long as necessary to take us where we want to go," says Suwarso. "Through the difficulties, through the good times and the bad, we will always remain focused on our mission of making this club successful, on and off the pitch".

Wise has convinced another former Premier League star, Thierry Henry, to get involved, initially with social projects connected to the city. The plan is not only to bring Como to the world, but also to increase the engagement of the city to their club. For example, every time the team wins a match this season, there will be free drinks on offer in a bar in the city.

It is a policy that has not proved too costly so far; by early January the club had only picked up the tab for five rounds of drinks. Draws have been the team's speciality, leaving them struggling towards the wrong end of the table, while Fabregas' involvement has been limited so far. In September, Gattuso paid for the slow start with his job, but results have improved under his replacement, Moreno Longo.

The dream of a return to Serie A will probably have to wait another season at least.

Project...Como's head of football Dennis Wise with Thierry Henry

SIMON MIGNOLET

"I've played a big part in the team's success"

The Club Brugge and Belgium goalkeeper sits down with *World Soccer* to discuss World Cup heartbreak, making Champions League history and setting up his own coffee business

Simon Mignolet is one of the most level-headed footballers you could ever wish to meet. The 34-year-old exudes calmness and consideration; both his love and knowledge of football are evident, but it also becomes clear that the game is far from his only passion. In addition to his goalkeeping duties for Belgian champions Club Brugge, he also has a degree in political science and runs his own coffee company. He is much more than Champions League victories and international caps.

Mignolet is currently enjoying his fourth season with Brugge since leaving Liverpool to return to his native Belgium in 2019. He's already racked up well over 100 appearances for the Blue And Blacks, lifting the league title in each of the last three seasons, and in September signed a new deal keeping him at the club until 2026. Meanwhile, he has also remained a constant presence in the Belgium squad, going to each of the last three World Cups.

The latest attempt at silverware for the Red Devils ended in headline-making disappointment as they unexpectedly exited Qatar 2022 at the group stage – a group, it turns out, that contained two eventual semi-finalists. Though Mignolet readily admits the early elimination came as something of a shock, he believes fortune was not on the Red Devils' side from the outset.

"It was something we didn't expect. We knew the opposition was going to be tough, but most people made us favourites to win the group," he says. "However, I think we knew we weren't in our best moment. We had some big injuries, Lukaku being the obvious one, and there were some minor physical issues in the defence. That didn't help.

"We probably needed a few more games before the World Cup to get up to speed but, with the timing of the tournament, that wasn't possible. Our warm-up game against Egypt [a 2-1 defeat] was far from ideal and it definitely knocked our confidence. When we won our first group game [against Canada] we were lucky, but we thought it could help us grow into the tournament. Sometimes you need wins like that. You could say we were unlucky against Morocco – we didn't deserve to win, but we didn't deserve to lose either – and we probably should have won against Croatia, but that's what happens in World Cups. You have to take your chances. It's frustrating, but it's important to accept that our opponents were strong."

For the last few years Mignolet has played national team understudy to Real Madrid's Thibaut Courtois, but his lack of international game time hasn't diminished the thrill of pulling on a Belgium jersey and representing his country. Mignolet remains confident that his performances for his club, his unwavering work ethic, and his dedication to doing what's best for the team (Jurgen Klopp labelled him the "most standout professional" he's ever worked with) will keep him in contention for another shot at the number one position – at least until he decides to hang up his gloves.

Despite the pain associated with Belgium's undoubted recent underachievement, Mignolet is now determined to look forward, not back. He is pragmatic, no-nonsense, and has already turned his attention to other things: Club Brugge's first-ever tilt at the Champions League knockout stage, for example.

"We made it through a very difficult group," Mignolet says. "I don't think many people thought we could do it but we always believed. We got close a couple of years ago [2020–21] so to get it done this time around is really special. We've won the league for the last three seasons, which goes a long way to showing how unified the team is. Our progress in the Champions League is down to all of us as a collective.

UNIBET
CLUB BRUGGE
Pro League
MIGNOLET

Penalty specialist ...Mignolet saves a penalty for Liverpool

> "I would have loved to have played [at Liverpool] longer. But if there are moments in your career when you're not playing – in my case I hadn't played properly for 18 months – you have to make a decision"

"On a personal level I believe I played really well throughout the group stage. We didn't concede in five of the six games. Knowing that I've played a big part in the team's success to this point is a great feeling."

It's a competition that holds a particular place in Mignolet's heart. His six-year stint at Liverpool culminated in Champions League success following a 2-0 victory over Tottenham Hotspur in Madrid in 2019, and though he was on the bench when the final whistle blew, Mignolet admits it's an experience that he will always cherish, but will be almost impossible to top. "Winning the Champions League is something exceptional. Not many players will ever get to lift that trophy. I loved the whole journey and I'll never forget it."

For most English football fans, Mignolet will always be best known for his time representing the red half of Merseyside, joining in 2013 after an eye-catching three-year spell at Sunderland. He became an immediate favourite with the Anfield faithful after saving a penalty (and the resulting follow-up shot) on his debut against Stoke City, and bolstered his reputation as a penalty specialist throughout his time at the club. Of the 17 penalties he faced as a Liverpool goalkeeper, he kept out seven – a success rate of 41 per cent. Only four goalkeepers have made more penalty saves in the Premier League than Mignolet's eight.

In total Mignolet made over 200 appearances for Liverpool but, upon the arrival of Brazilian Alisson Becker in 2018, he found himself routinely consigned to the bench. While eminently dedicated to the Liverpool cause, Mignolet admits that, after almost two years of playing second fiddle, he ultimately had little choice but to seek playing time elsewhere.

"I don't regret leaving Liverpool. It's not that I wasn't happy there – I would have loved to have played there longer. But if there are moments in your career when you're not playing – in my case I hadn't played properly for 18 months – you have to make a decision," Mignolet admits. "I wanted to be important

Golden Shoe...Mignolet was named Belgian football's Player of the Year for 2022. The last goalkeeper to win the award was Michel Preud'homme in 1989

again on the pitch. It was a big step [moving to Club Brugge] but it's been entirely for the best.

"I can only consider the experience of playing for Liverpool to be hugely positive. There were high and low moments, and I learned as much from the good times as the bad. Being part of such a huge community and playing for an historic club was an incredible experience. Could things have gone better? Maybe. But there's no point looking back over your shoulder and harbouring regrets. I still keep an eye on Sunderland and Liverpool and want them to do well. I'm looking forward to one day heading back to Anfield. It hasn't happened yet but I'm sure it will."

Since his return to Belgium in 2019, Mignolet has not only been able to reignite his playing career, but has accomplished plenty off the pitch. He is now a father of two – Lex was born in 2019, and Vin in 2022 – and also runs his own coffee business, Twenty-Two Coffee, alongside his brother Wouter. As well as having a brick-and-mortar coffee shop in Sint-Truiden, Mignolet's hometown, Twenty-Two Coffee also sells six different types of coffee capsule for home use.

"Being an entrepreneur, and having a focus outside of football, gives you a broader perspective on life. It's another challenge to learn from. Understanding how best to manage people, and figuring out what it takes to run a business, is a great test for me. I like progressing and improving myself. Since becoming a parent I've found that, when I come home, it's much easier to put football aside. In the past I might have gone home and looked back at performances and worried about small, insignificant issues, but now I've got my hands full constantly. It's tough sometimes, of course, but I wouldn't change it."

Interview by Joe Phelan

Making history...Brugge players celebrate qualifying for the Champions League knockouts *Credit: Club Brugge*

Question time

MILAN

WHO WILL BE MILAN'S ATTACKING TRUMP CARD?

Facing a Tottenham Hotspur defence prone to inconsistency and unforced errors, the *Rossoneri* will be optimistic that their front-line partnership of Olivier Giroud and Rafael Leao will be able to fire them to their first Champions League quarter-final since 2012.

The partnership of golden oldie target man Giroud and the lively, mobile Leao, still only 23, has proved a key element in Milan's renaissance, and if Spurs manager Antonio Conte is to justify his reputation as a defensive mastermind, he will have to find a way to neutralise the pair.

In demand ...clubs are queuing up to sign Leao

Easier said than done. The 36-year-old Giroud, who especially caught the eye at the World Cup in Qatar and now installed as France's all-time top scorer, is highly effective when laying the ball off with his back to goal, clever in his decoy runs and invariably in the right place at the right time in the penalty box.

Leao is the ying to Giroud's yang. Tremendously quick over the ground and a brilliant dribbler, the former Lille starlet has come on leaps and bounds over the past year. More opportunistic, more self-confident and much less likely to fade from view when the going gets tough. His sensational goal against Switzerland at the World Cup, skilfully cutting inside before curling the ball into the top corner from the left edge of the box, was something of a work of art. Milan team-mate, the Belgian midfielder Alexis Saelemakers, has gone as far as to describe Leao as the most talented player at Milan, arguing that the latter has the potential to be a future Ballon d'Or winner.

Giroud and Leao have an almost telepathic understanding, the sort of instinctive chemistry which all great attacking combos bring to the table. While Giroud serves as the ever aware and robust point of reference, Leao trips the light fantastic around him, alternating between his nominal position on the left wing and central areas. Giroud's aerial power and penalty-box instincts allied to Leao's pace and audacious technical ability makes for quite the dual threat.

Especially effective in counter-attack mode, the pair were made to play together. They complement each other perfectly and it's no statistical quirk that a large proportion of Milan's

Deadly duo... Rafael Leao and Olivier Giroud

goals stem from a goal or assist from the pair.

The movers and shakers at Milan are not fools and are busy negotiating new deals for the pair. Leao, who has just 18 months left on his current deal, is apparently on the radar of a number of big clubs – including Real Madrid plus Premier League high flyers – and Milan executives will have to at least triple his reported wages of €1.5m-a-year plus bonuses. As for Giroud, Milan would dearly love to retain him for another season.

Nick Bidwell

Rafael Leao is the ying to Olivier Giroud's yang. Tremendously quick over the ground and a brilliant dribbler, the former Lille starlet has come on leaps and bounds over the past year

TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR

IS SPURS' MIDFIELD GOOD ENOUGH FOR THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE KNOCKOUT STAGES?

Probably not. In a unit which is principally staffed by athletic holding or box-to-box midfielders, Tottenham desperately need greater quantities of control, tempo and guile. A classic number ten, rather than relying on Harry Kane to drop deep and play-make, would help no end.

Needs help... Tottenham's Harry Kane

CLUB BRUGGE

CAN NEW MANAGER SCOTT PARKER HANDLE THE STEP UP?

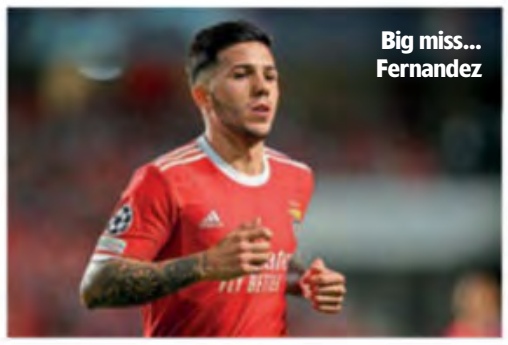
In many ways, Parker's appointment makes little sense. He only played nine Champions League games, has never managed outside the UK and, while he did steer Fulham and Bournemouth to the Premier League, he subsequently found the top flight too hot to handle.

Stepping up... Scott Parker

BENFICA

HOW HARD WILL IT BE TO FILL THE VOID LEFT BY ENZO FERNANDEZ?

Benfica boss Roger Schmidt insists they will not be derailed by the departure of one individual, but the Eagles are bound to miss Fernandez's ability to win the ball, distribute it with thought, and dynamically drive forward. His potential replacements, Chiquinho and Norway's Fredrik Aursnes, are not remotely of the same calibre.



Big miss... Fernandez

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN

WHERE ARE THE FRENCH GIANTS MOST VULNERABLE?

While boasting a stellar attacking threat – personified, of course, by the trident of Kylian Mbappe, Lionel Messi and Neymar – the Parisians are not nearly as strong defensively. Under new coach Christophe Galtier, their back line has creaked and flattered to deceive in both a three and four-man configuration and too many of their key defenders appear in decline. Skipper Marquinhos often looked like an accident waiting to happen in 2022, Spanish veteran Sergio Ramos is anything but the warrior king of his Real Madrid days, and France international Presnel Kimpembe has been beset with hamstring and Achilles problems.

As they showed in recent back-to-back Ligue 1 away defeats (3-1 at high-flying Lens and 1-0 to a youthful Rennes), PSG have a soft centre at the back and their round of 16 opponents Bayern Munich will fancy their chances of taking full advantage.

Former France full-back Bixente Lizarazu, who lined up for Bayern for a number of years, declared earlier this season that PSG don't react well when confronted with aggressive opponents, and this criticism certainly applies to the French champions' defensive work of late. Up against teams who are not fearful of the PSG aura and who know how to operate a regular intense press, Galtier's side often give the impression of being lost at sea. In defensive transitions, PSG can be too slow

PSG have a soft centre at the back and their round of 16 opponents Bayern Munich will fancy their chances of taking full advantage

Vulnerable...PSG's centre-back pair

and passive, the defensive midfielders do not win enough duels, and with the Parisian full-backs frequently in attack mode there is space aplenty to exploit on the flanks.

Marquinhos and Sergio Ramos have a tendency to lose concentration at vital times and, in another worrying development, they have begun to struggle when defending set-pieces, lacking in positional rigour, not sufficiently single-minded when attacking crosses and failing to deal with second balls into their own box.

Troubled... Galtier watches his side's defeat to Rennes

PSG boss Galtier, once a gritty, obdurate full-back in his playing days at Marseille, knows full well that such defensive deficiencies must be solved – and fast. "I had trouble recognising my team," he admitted after the Lens reverse. "We lacked cohesion. The longer the game went on, the more we fell apart." Mbappe, Neymar and Messi cannot always be relied upon to bail them out. They have to play with more discipline, hunger and willingness to go through the pain barrier.

Nick Bidwell

BAYERN MUNICH

HOW SERIOUS ARE BAYERN MUNICH'S INJURY WORRIES?

Goalkeeper and captain Manuel Neuer gave Bayern a huge problem by breaking his leg during an ill-advised post-World Cup skiing run, but new signing Yann Sommer, a proven international with Switzerland, should be a more than capable stand-in. Julian Nagelsmann is also confident that Sadio Mane will be fit following a fibula operation.

Broken leg... Manuel Neuer

EINTRACHT FRANKFURT

WHO IS EINTRACHT'S MOST-IMPROVED PLAYER?

Many would point to young Danish attacking midfielder Jesper Lindstrom, whose dribbling skills, speed and incisive passing are defining factors in the team's attacking play. The 22-year-old starlet attributes his enhanced standards to working with a sports psychologist.

Most improved... Jesper Lindstrom

NAPOLI

WHAT MAKES STRIKER VICTOR OSIMHEN SO SPECIAL?

The ex-Lille hitman appears to have it all: aerial power, physicality, athleticism, pace – over short and long distances – bravery, goalscoring instincts in the box, cunning, ferocity and leadership qualities. A real threat when latching onto long balls, Osimhen is a 100 per cent warrior.

Complete package... Osimhen

BORUSSIA DORTMUND

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE RETURN OF SEBASTIEN HALLER?

Needless to say, the Ivory Coast striker's successful battle with a tumour is a huge psychological boost for Dortmund. Handed a testicular cancer diagnosis just a few days after signing from Ajax last summer, the centre-forward could not possibly have imagined a worse start to life at the Westfalenstadion. Now, following two operations and a course of chemotherapy, he is back, eager to make up for lost time.

"I felt goose bumps on seeing him back in training with us," revealed Dortmund skipper Marco Reus during the club's winter training camp in Marbella. "We're just so happy that he's back. We've all admired the fight he has shown. He has displayed incredible mental strength. It's really impressive."

Dortmund coach Edin Terzic also had high praise for Haller's steely reaction to the bombshell medical bulletin. "In my first conversation with him after the diagnosis, what struck me was his positivity. He encouraged all the officials at the club to be equally positive."

Teenage sensation Youssoufa Moukoko did a fine job of providing cover at the point of the Dortmund attack in the first half of this season, so much so that he was a surprise inclusion in Germany's World Cup squad. But with all respect to Moukoko, the 28-year-old Haller offers Dortmund so much more in terms of physical presence and top-level know-how. Prior to his ill-timed illness, Haller was one of Europe's most in-form forwards, racking up no fewer than 34 goals last

Proven performer ...Haller scored 11 Champions League goals in 2021-22

term, including a whopping 11 in the Champions League – a tally bettered only by Karim Benzema (15) and Robert Lewandowski (13).

Incredible to think that last term was Haller's first-ever campaign in the Champions League. And what an impact he made, scoring four goals on his debut in the competition against Sporting and achieving the rare distinction of netting in each of his first six group phase fixtures.

> "I felt goose bumps on seeing him back in training with us – we're just so happy that he's back"
> Dortmund captain Marco Reus

No wonder Dortmund were keen to splash out €31m for him in the summer. Haller is not only a goal machine. He has an excellent all-round game too, able to hold the ball up, link up the play and create chances for his team-mates as well. First and foremost, Haller is a real team man. A Chelsea defence short on confidence and solidity will have to watch him closely indeed.

Nick Bidwell

Bouncing back... Sebastien Haller

CHELSEA

HAS CHELSEA'S SPENDING SPREE ENHANCED THEIR PROSPECTS?

Although the Blues have, on the face of it, made a number of sound acquisitions in January in an attempt to revive their season – notably on-loan Portuguese attacker Joao Felix, world champion Enzo Fernandez and Ukraine winger Mykhaylo Mudryk – the recruitment process has been more scattergun than methodical.

New signing ...Mudryk

INTERNAZIONALE

HAS LAUTARO MARTINEZ SHAKEN OFF THE ANKLE PROBLEM THAT HINDERED HIS WORLD CUP?

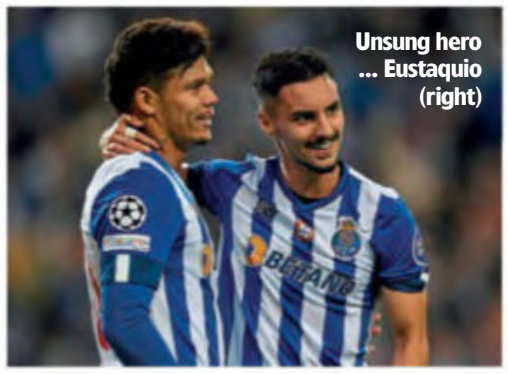
Martinez had to resort to painkilling injections to play in Qatar, and Inter feared it could be a long-term problem. Thankfully for the *Nerazzurri*, those fears have been allayed: Martinez is their top scorer this term and has a happy knack of rescuing them in difficult moments.

Star striker ...Lautaro Martinez

PORTO

WHO WAS THE UNSUNG HERO OF THE SIDE THAT TOPPED GROUP B?

A Canada international with Portuguese roots, central midfield schemer Stephen Eustaquio is not yet a household name in Europe. But the 26-year-old soon will be if he keeps up the good work. Once thought exclusively as a tough-tackling ball-winner, he now is just as likely to supply goals and creativity.



Unsung hero ... Eustaquio (right)

REAL MADRID

WHAT TACTICS WILL REAL MADRID EMPLOY AGAINST LIVERPOOL?

Los Blancos boss Carlo Ancelotti is not one to overthink a matchday plan. Always the pragmatist, the four-time champion does not like to complicate the instructions he gives to his charges and if a formula has worked previously – such as when guiding Real to a 1-0 victory over Liverpool in last season's Champions League final – the chances are that the Italian managerial maestro will stick with it.

In Paris last May, Ancelotti secured the Champions League crown with an asymmetric 4-2-2-2 system, one in which the versatile Uruguayan Fede Valverde was added to the mix as a fourth midfielder, essentially there to block off the forward runs of ever-adventurous Liverpool left-back Andy Robertson.

Midfield orchestrator ...Toni Kroos

The Ancelotti plan that night was a simple one: stymie the glittering array of Merseyside attacking talent with two banks of four, mainly play on the break and especially look to expose the right side of the Liverpool back line, where they hoped to get the better of full-back Trent Alexander-Arnold and central defender Ibrahima Konate. To this end, Real's left flank was often overloaded, with winger Vinicius Junior frequently joined out wide by centre-forward Karim Benzema. Expect a similar hole-punching scenario from Real in their last-16 face-off this time around.

Another key tactic for Madrid will be to maintain good possession, intelligently and patiently progressing the ball through the thirds. Real have a wonderful midfield orchestrator and time-keeper in the shape of Toni Kroos and if he is given the time and space to exert control, Real invariably are open for business. A five-time Champions League winner, Kroos has few peers when it comes to vision, passing accuracy and range of distribution. Ageless Croatian playmaker Luka Modric may be the ultimate in imaginative, buzzing creativity, but Kroos is the man who makes Real tick.

Champions League expert...Carlo Ancelotti with last season's trophy

Not that all is going swimmingly for Real this season. Defensively they have been springing a few leaks and, as a team, they have often appeared

Real have a wonderful midfield orchestrator and time-keeper in the shape of Toni Kroos

unbalanced. Individual problems abound. New signings such as German central defender Antonio Rudiger and French defensive midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni have yet to fully integrate; versatile Austrian defender David Alaba has lost form – possibly as a result of being forced to play left-back rather than his favoured central brief – as has France left-back Ferland Mendy, who is fast becoming a target for the Bernabeu boo boys.

Ancelotti's side have not been playing with their usual compactness and synchronism. A cause for concern?

Nick Bidwell

LIVERPOOL

IS LIVERPOOL'S PATCHY FORM LINKED TO THEIR PURSUIT OF A TROPHY LAST TERM?

It's a more than plausible explanation. They are not playing with the same zip or energy, opponents have begun to outrun them and their once fearsome pressing machine is spluttering. They are simply not winning the ball back like they used to.

Out of sorts ...Liverpool

RB LEIPZIG

CAN LEIPZIG PROGRESS WITHOUT GOALKEEPER PETER GULACSI, WHO WAS INJURED LAST AUTUMN?

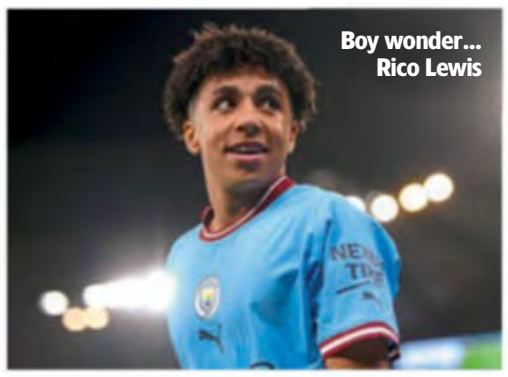
The loss of RB's captain and first-choice goalkeeper to a cruciate ligament injury was a severe blow. A fine shot stopper and an experienced Champions League campaigner, the Hungarian is far more accomplished than his back-up, Janis Blaswich, who is essentially a journeyman.

Second choice... Janis Blaswich

MANCHESTER CITY

IN WHICH AREA OF THE PITCH ARE CITY CURRENTLY THE WEAKEST?

Full-back has become a problem area for City, with Kyle Walker substituted at half-time twice since the World Cup and Joao Cancelo leaving for Bayern Munich. Yet a solution may have emerged in 18-year-old Rico Lewis, who has shone in his early career at right-back.



Boy wonder... Rico Lewis

Ones to watch

Nick Bidwell picks out 12 players to keep an eye on in the knockout stages

Vincenzo GRIFO

FREIBURG

Long-serving Freiburg coach Christian Streich, an expert in over-achieving on a shoestring, never likes to single individuals out for praise, preferring to emphasise the team as a collective. But even he would be tempted to make an exception for this highly influential winger-cum-playmaker.

Born in southwest Germany to Italian parents, Grifo, 29, is in the form of his life at the moment, dazzling with his dead-eye finishing, wand of a right foot – although usually stationed on the left – set-piece excellence and sheer unpredictability.

Hat-trick hero... Grifo celebrates his treble against Union Berlin in November

Make no mistake. If little Freiburg are performing so well across the board this season – second in the Bundesliga at the winter break and comfortably winning their Europa League group – Grifo is one of the principle reasons why; imaginative, precise and constantly switching with menace between the left flank and central areas.

Grifo, who has served Freiburg with distinction in two separate spells over seven seasons, proved especially potent in a three-day burst of brilliance last November: a rapid first-half hat-trick in a 4-1 Bundesliga romp against Union Berlin, then a gala display for Italy in a 3-1 friendly victory over Albania, a game in which he netted a brace and made the other *Azzurri* goal. "Vincenzo is an extraordinary boy, a tremendous player with significant qualities," gushed Italy coach Roberto Mancini. "Today, his two goals were exceptional."

> **"Vincenzo is a tremendous player with significant qualities"**
>
> Italy coach Roberto Mancini

The Freiburg star would have been delighted with this five-star statement performance in Albania. Without making a song and dance about it, he was disappointed not to be included in Italy's triumphant squad at Euro 2020. He now is back in Roberto Mancini's

Impressive left-back ...Balde

Teddy TEUMA
UNION SAINT-GILLOISE

The dynamic midfielder and Union skipper is the best player to have emerged from Malta in a long time. Outstanding in both a number ten role or as a holder, he is tenacious, full of drive, extremely creative and knows where the goal is.

Alejandro BALDE
BARCELONA

Still only 19, left-back Balde has been going from strength to strength and will soon be the undisputed first-choice for both Barcelona and Spain. His recent World Cup outings in Qatar will help take him to an even higher level.

Santiago GIMENEZ
FEYENOORD

In his first season in Rotterdam following a move from Cruz Azul in his native Mexico, the young striker has struck it lucky as a Europa League super-sub, coming off the bench to score three goals in home and away clashes with Italian giants Lazio.

Brais MENDEZ
REAL SOCIEDAD

Exceptional attacking midfielder who has hit the ground running since arriving at the Anoeta Stadium from Celta Vigo last summer. Capable of outrageous moments of skill, such as his audacious backheel goal for Celta against Rayo Vallecano last season.

Nicola ZALEWSKI
ROMA

Roma boss Jose Mourinho has a soft spot for the industrious and tactically-aware youngster, 21, who can put in a shift at left-back, further forward on that flank or in a box-to-box role. Born in the Rome region to Polish parents.

Pedro GONCALVES
SPORTING

Any discussion about goalscoring at Lisbon giants Sporting inevitably leads to high praise for the red zone contribution of incisive left-winger Goncalves (aka "Pote") who in two-and-a-half seasons with the Lions is approaching the 50-goal mark.

Adama TRAORE
FERENCVAROS

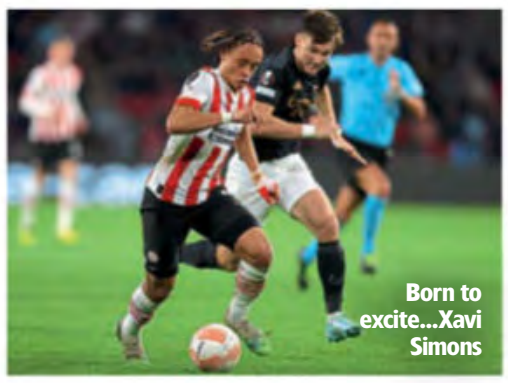
The Mali international forward, a sharp, raiding frontrunner, is capable of posing a threat anywhere along the front line. Now 27, he first made a name for himself at African powerhouse TP Mazembe of DR Congo.

Guido RODRIGUEZ
REAL BETIS

This resourceful defensive midfielder is the type of player who instinctively gives an optimum balance to any team. A squad member of Argentina's World Cup-winning party, albeit he only appeared in one group game.

Xavi SIMONS
PSV

In his first season as a regular starter in the pro ranks, the former Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain youth-teamer is finally living up to all the prodigy hype of his tender years. A classy, versatile midfielder born to excite.



Born to excite...Xavi Simons

Adrien TRUFFERT
RENNES

Indefatigable, attack-conscious left-back, who recently starred in the Breton club's 1-0 Ligue 1 victory over the mighty PSG. Serie A giants Inter are thought to be very keen on the 21-year-old French international.

Diogo LEITE
UNION BERLIN

The Berliner top brass pulled off quite a coup last summer in securing a 12-month loan deal for the promising 24-year-old Porto centre-back. A €7.5m option to buy looks an absolute snip.

good books and is looking forward to featuring for the *Azzurri* at the 2024 European Championship, which, conveniently, is to be held in his German backyard. "Nothing would be better than to play for Italy at Euro 2024. My family and I come from near Stuttgart and it would be fantastic if they could be there to watch me."

Many pundits in both Germany and Italy have often wondered why no Serie A club has ever brought him on board. He certainly has the skill-set to be a hit in the Italian top flight and is a rabid aficionado of football in that part of the world. An Internazionale fan, he would walk over hot coals to be part of the elite *calcio* scene. "That dream is still alive," he insists.

Mourinho favourite ...Nicola Zalewski

Ones to watch

Nick Bidwell highlights 12 stars to watch in the Europa Conference League

Khephren THURAM

NICE

The Thuram football family tree looks more like a forest than ever. Lilian, the head of the family, won 142 caps for France and played an instrumental role in the conquest of the 1998 World Cup. His cousin, Yohann Thuram-Ulien, is a pro goalkeeper with Quevilly Rouen in the French second tier. And now the baton has passed to Lilian's two sons, Marcus and Khephren, both shining stars of the French game.

Marcus, who currently earns his living as an attacker with Borussia Monchengladbach in the Bundesliga, featured for France at the Qatar World Cup, while younger sibling Khephren, 21, an all-action and key midfielder for Nice, is tipped to imminently add full international honours to his extensive collection of youth and Under-21 appearances for France.

Next Thuram... Khephren is fouled during the group-stage clash with Cologne

In theory, Khephren is a defensive midfielder, but in reality he offers much more than pressing, covering and tackling. What really sets him apart is the ease with which he initiates attacks, breaking the lines with either an insightful pass or rampaging forward run with the ball glued to his feet. He clearly has inherited his father's immense physicality. While his tender age hints at a certain rawness, his strength, presence and competitiveness screams fully-grown adult.

A compelling mixture of power, height and technique, his growing reputation has turned him into hot property

A compelling mixture of power, height and technique, his growing reputation has turned him into hot property indeed. A host of Italian and Premier League clubs are thought to be tracking his every move, as are perennial French champions Paris Saint-Germain. PSG coach Christophe Galtier, who worked with him last term at Nice, is a devotee of the youngster and dearly would love to bring him to the capital.

Khephren, born in Italy at a time when his dad was playing for Parma, has benefitted from a wonderful football education. And not only because of his father's tips. As a toddler he was kicking a ball

Terrific treble... Morales celebrates his hat-trick versus Austria Vienna

around with the likes of Lionel Messi, Thierry Henry, Ronaldinho and Samuel Eto'o at the Barcelona training ground, and he was good enough to gain a place at France's much-admired national academy at Clairefontaine.

In terms of coaches, he has been guided by some of the biggest names in world football. He was handed his pro debut at Monaco by Henry – making his bow in a 2018-19 Champions League tie against Atletico Madrid at the age of just 17 – and, after leaving for Nice in 2019, came under the managerial influence of the legendary Patrick Vieira. The latter especially admired Khephren's box-to-box work, and when Khephren makes his trademark long-striding breaks into opposition territory, one inevitably thinks of Vieira doing the same in his Arsenal and France pomp.

Jose Luis MORALES
VILLARREAL

Evergreen 35-year-old striker who, in a surprise twist, ended a decade-long association with Levante to sign for the Yellow Submarine last summer. Netted a Europa Conference League group stage hat-trick versus Austria Vienna in October.

Aleksandar CAVRIC
SLOVAN BRATISLAVA

The versatile Serbian attacker, comfortable as a winger, striker or attacking midfielder, has supplied much of the firepower as Slovan became the first Slovakian club to qualify for the knockout phase of a European competition in 17 years.

Dani DE WIT
AZ

Excellent all-terrain midfielder with a great engine and an eye for goal. Once an Ajax starlet and captain of the Dutch Under-21 side, he joined AZ back in 2019 in a €2m deal and has become an integral part of the team.

Joel ASORO
DJURGARDENS

Speedy right-winger equally impressive in his finishing as his selfless chance-making. A much-travelled pro, having played in England, the Netherlands and Italy, he recently scored on his senior international debut for Sweden.

Mattia ZACCAGNI
LAZIO

Lazio head coach Maurizio Sarri made an inspired decision when he opted to play Zaccagni on the left wing rather than the latter's favourite role as a number ten. Sarri rightly wants the former Verona star to push forward and go for goal more.

Excelling... Mattia Zaccagni

Serdar GURLER
ISTANBUL BASAKSEHIR

Mercurial, irrepressible French-born Turk who can produce moments of magic on either flank. Quick, cheeky and an improvisational master, he is never more a threat when seemingly in a tight spot. At his ninth Turkish club.

Christian KOUAME
FIORENTINA

The long-legged Ivorian winger or centre-forward has proved priceless in the Europa Conference League this season, creating a large proportion of the Viola's goals. Scored a brilliant bicycle kick in the 3-0 win at Hearts.

Simon BANZA
BRAGA

With Vitinha moving to Marseille, Braga will be looking to the leggy 26-year-old forward to take up the slack. Banza, who joined from Ligue 1 Lens last summer, is both an excellent leader of the line and an opportunistic finisher with either foot.

Mario STROEYKENS
ANDERLECHT

Former Belgium head coach Roberto Martinez was reported to be a keen admirer of the pacy, adaptable teenage attacker. A hard-running devourer of space, outstanding in his movement and full of drive and confidence.

Teenage talent... Mario Stroeykens

Darian MALES
BASEL

In the second of a two-season loan spell from Internazionale, the 21-year-old attacking midfielder – a Switzerland youth international at various levels – has exploded into life these past few months and has three goals in this season's Europa Conference League.

Artem DOVBYK
DNIPRO-1

A constant thorn in the side of Europa Conference League opponents this term, the opportunistic striker scored five goals in the group stage. The 14-cap Ukraine international also netted versus Scotland in last summer's World Cup play-offs.

6 of the best January transfers

Jamie Evans takes a look at some of the standout stories from the January transfer window

Fresh start... Memphis is unveiled

1 Memphis DEPAY

BARCELONA TO ATLETICO MADRID

Spanish giants Barcelona continue to serve reminders of their financial mismanagement of recent years, and selling Netherlands forward Memphis Depay for only €4 million is simply the latest example. The Dutchman scored 12 goals in 2021-22 after arriving as a free transfer from Lyon, yet has been completely discarded this season by the Camp Nou outfit.

His form in a Netherlands shirt – 22 goals in his last 25 matches for *Oranje* to move within seven of Robin van Persie's all-time Dutch goalscoring record – shows that he is still more than capable of performing at the highest level and, at the age of 29, he still has plenty more to offer. In seeking out Depay as Joao Felix's cut-price replacement, Atletico may have landed an absolute bargain.

2 Lucas PEREZ

CADIZ TO DEPORTIVO LA CORUNA

Lucas Perez's decision to step down from top-flight Cadiz to play for his hometown club in the third tier is the stuff of football fairy tales. The former Arsenal and West Ham United forward even reportedly paid a portion of his own transfer fee in order to make the deal happen, re-joining the club for a fourth spell.

Despite a journeyman career that has also seen him play in Ukraine and Greece, this is no case of a washed-up veteran signing for a final farewell, either – Perez was Cadiz's top scorer in La Liga, and struck four goals in his first three matches for promotion-chasing Deportivo. The Galicia-based club won La Liga in 2000, but were relegated to the third tier in 2020.

Short stay... Perez joined Cadiz in January 2022

3 Oscar GLOUKH

MACCABI TEL AVIV TO RB SALZBURG

Given their track record in recruiting exciting young talent, it is always worth taking note of Red Bull Salzburg's transfer activity, and in January the Austrian champions saw off competition from Barcelona to snap up Gloukh. A star of last summer's Euro U19 Championship, scoring three goals and assisting two as Israel finished runners-up, Gloukh has since been called up by the senior side and scored on his second appearance in November.

The 18-year-old playmaker had already become a key player for Maccabi Tel Aviv, and signed off by playing a key role in their 3-0 win over league leaders Maccabi Haifa. If he continues to impress, Barca and others will come calling again.

Talented... Gloukh at the Euro U19 Championship

Impressive... Solbakken celebrates scoring v Roma

4 Ola SOLBAKKEN

BODO/GLIMT TO ROMA

Another club with a reputation for developing top talent on a meagre budget, Bodo/Glimt have turned plenty of heads with their performances in Europe in recent years. Undoubtedly their most eye-catching result was the 6-1 demolition of Roma in last season's Europa Conference League group stage, and it was his performance in that match that earned Solbakken a move to the competition's eventual champions. The winger struck two goals in the thrashing of Jose Mourinho's side, and then added another in the return fixture in Rome. The Portuguese coach was clearly impressed and signed the Norway international when his contract expired at the end of 2022.

5 Viktor TSYGANKOV

DYNAMO KYIV TO GIRONA

Ukrainian talent... Tsygankov in this season's Europa League

A glance through UEFA's list of 50 young players to watch ahead of the 2018-19 campaign reveals some familiar names, including Phil Foden, Frenkie de Jong, Nicolo Barella and Rodri to name but a few. Yet others on the list are still waiting to live up to the expectations.

Long regarded as one of Ukraine's brightest talents, it is something of a surprise to see 25-year-old winger Tsygankov joining La Liga side Girona rather than a European giant. He has remained a consistent goalscorer since breaking through in 2018, and is a regular for the national team, yet only now has he sealed a move to one of Europe's major leagues. Can he live up to his early promise at the City Football Group club and take the next step up the career ladder?

6 Raimonds KROLLIS

VALMIERA TO SPEZIA

Krollis' move is a major moment for Latvian football – he is the first player from the Baltic nation to play in Serie A. Described by *World Soccer*'s Nick Bidwell as "Latvia's best young player", the 21-year-old was the top scorer in the 2022 Latvian top-flight campaign, firing Valmiera to their first-ever league title. However, the majority of his 25 goals came inside the penalty box and he is unlikely to get the same quality of chances for Spezia, one of the lowest-scoring teams in Italy. Still, if he can find his feet in Serie A, it could be a turning point for Latvia, for whom Krollis already has 27 caps.

Latvian prospect ...Krollis takes on Germany

FABULOUS FOOTBALLER, GORGEOUS SOUL

The late Gianluca Vialli was an outstanding striker on the pitch and a gentleman off it

Words: Paddy Agnew

European champion... Vialli celebrates Italy's triumph at Euro 2020

The New Year began on a deeply sad note with the death of Gianluca Vialli, one of Italian football's most successful and best-loved sons. The ex-Cremonese, Sampdoria, Juventus and Chelsea striker died in London on January 6, at the age of 58.

Italian clubs, fans and VIPs, starting with Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, came together in an outburst of mourning as the nation celebrated the memory of a man who was more than just a great footballer. He had also won the admiration of Italians for the open and courageous way in which he had battled with pancreatic cancer since first being diagnosed in 2018.

Those sentiments were echoed by much of the international football community, with many clubs around the world – starting with Chelsea and Juventus – celebrating his memory with a minute's silence and the wearing of his iconic number nine shirt during their pre-match warm-ups.

In his homeland, Vialli experienced two prolonged moments of intense fame and popularity: first in the late 1980s and throughout the '90s, when he was considered one of the best strikers of his generation, and secondly in his role as a member of Roberto Mancini's staff during Italy's Euro 2020 campaign. As he embraced his old team-mate on the Wembley pitch having finally lifted the trophy, Vialli had already waged a very public battle against his cancer.

It was fitting that the final glorious moment of Vialli's football career should take place in London, the city that he

"Goal Twins"... Mancini and Vialli at Sampdoria

had called home ever since moving to Chelsea in 1996. His popularity was as great in England as it was in Italy, as evidenced by the genuine sense of loss experienced by so many Chelsea fans.

There was nothing banal about Vialli's glittering career. For a start, how many professional footballers grow up in a 60-room, 16th century castle? The Villa Affaitati, near Cremona, was the Vialli family home thanks to the riches of Gianluca's father Gianfranco, a successful entrepreneur.

His professional career began in 1981 as a dashing winger with his local side Cremonese. After playing a key part in winning promotion to Serie A in the 1983-84 season, his talents were noticed by the highly ambitious, Genoa-based Sampdoria, who swooped in to sign him for £1.8 million.

It was here that the Vialli story really began. In his first season there, Sampdoria won their first-ever major honour, the Italian Cup. It proved to be the start of an eight-year winning cycle that saw "Samp" win three Italian Cups, one Super Cup, one European Cup Winners' Cup and – most importantly – the 1990-91 *Scudetto*.

"He is equally at home on the right, in the centre or on the left of attack," said Vujadin Boskov, his manager during that trophy-laden period. "He defends like a tiger, attacks like a lion and is sharper than a puma – whether he's got the ball or not."

Flying high...Vialli controlling the ball

That title with Sampdoria remains something of a legend in Italian football, as it represents the last time that a provincial club from outside the Milan-Turin-Rome triumvirate won the *Scudetto*.

Vialli was the spearhead of a side packed with quality, from goalkeeper Gianluca Pagliuca and defender Pietro Vierchowod at the back, to Brazilian midfielder Toninho Cerezo, winger Attilio Lombardo and, above all, Roberto Mancini alongside him in attack.

"On the pitch we were very complementary," Vialli told *Goals on Sunday* of his prolific partnership with Mancini. "He could be the centre-forward, I could drop back, and if things were not going particularly well we could do the opposite.

"When you've got two strikers who don't care whether the other striker is scoring three goals and you're not scoring any it's fantastic...the only thing that we wanted was for the team to win."

The "Goal Twins", as they became known, scored 231 goals between them during the eight seasons that they led Samp's attack, and they remain the club's two highest scorers of all time. Mancini arrived two years before Vialli and left five years later, but was never as successful without his scoring sibling.

As Sampdoria picked up trophies, Vialli picked up admirers. In 1986, after topping the scoring charts at the Under-21 European Championship, he

attracted an offer from Milan, which club president Paolo Mantovani seriously considered. Fans, though, were outraged; their protests made up Mantovani's mind, and Vialli stayed.

Yet Vialli was always destined to move on eventually – he was simply too good to stay at Samp forever. Soon after, another of Italy's giants came calling, this time Juventus.

The move to Turin, however, was delayed. Along with many other Samp stars, Vialli had made a pact to remain in Genoa until the club had won at least one league title. Accordingly, he stayed with Sampdoria not only to win the 1991 league title, but also to see the club into the 1992 European Cup final at Wembley, where they lost 1-0 to Barcelona. That final remained one of Vialli's biggest disappointments; he blamed himself for the defeat after missing a couple of early chances that he would have normally tucked away.

It proved to be his final match in a Sampdoria shirt, with Juve completing a move for him shortly afterwards for a then world-record fee of £12.5m. The UEFA Cup arrived in his first season and a league-cup double in 1994-95, a success that earned him the 1995 *World Soccer* Player of the Year award.

"After injury problems, he re-emerged at his very best last season to inspire Juve's title success," read the January 1996 issue of *World Soccer*, the magazine that crowned him the best player in the world with 18.26 per cent of the popular vote.

1995 *World Soccer* World Player of the Year...Gianluca Vialli

Later that year he made up for the heartbreak of 1992 by finally lifting the Champions League trophy as Juve captain. Even then though, the memory of the Barcelona defeat haunted him; when Lippi asked him to take one of the penalties in the final shootout against Ajax, he declined.

At the time, Vialli already knew that he was about to join Chelsea. As he later explained, he declined because he was worried that, if he missed his spot-kick, he would leave a "losing" memory of himself with Italian fans, as he became known as the man who missed chances in two European Cup finals.

Having won everything there was to win in Italy, Vialli's next stop was the Premier League, still in its infancy as a competition, where he made arguably his greatest global impact. Not only did he adapt brilliantly to the demands of English football as a striker (40 goals in three seasons), he also successfully assumed the role of player-manager at Chelsea, something that would be utterly impossible in the modern game.

When Ruud Gullit (another player-manager) was sacked by Chelsea in February 1998, Vialli stepped in and soon capitalised on the Dutchman's work, leading the team to victory in both the League Cup and the European Cup Winners' Cup. On top of that, as player and player-manager, Vialli also won an FA Cup, a Charity Shield and a UEFA Super Cup in West London – no wonder he is remembered so fondly at Stamford Bridge.

If Vialli experienced any real disappointment in his playing career, it perhaps came with the national team. A squad member at the 1986 World Cup, he was expected to play a starring role on home soil at Italia '90. Yet not only was he powerless to prevent the team from a penalty-shootout defeat to Diego Maradona's Argentina in the semi-finals, he was also handicapped by injury problems and overshadowed by Italy's man of the tournament, revelation striker Toto Schillaci.

That would prove to be his farewell to the national team at the highest level; Italy failed to qualify for the 1992 Euros in Sweden, and by the time Italy went to the 1994 World Cup in the USA, he was already two years out of the squad, having fallen out with manager Arrigo Sacchi.

> "When you've got two strikers who don't care whether the other striker is scoring three goals and you're not scoring any it's fantastic…the only thing that we wanted was for the team to win"
>
> **Vialli on his partnership with Roberto Mancini**

BELOW: Victorious ...Vialli embraces Mancini and subs Rafael Toloi and Leonardo Spinazzola after Italy's Euro 2020 victory

Euro '96 should have been Vialli's crowning moment in an *Azzurri* shirt. Fresh from Champions League glory with Juve, and in a tournament taking place in the country he was about to move to, it would have been the perfect way to sign off his international career and announce himself to the English public. Yet he was overlooked.

Italy fell at the first hurdle, with Sacchi paying for the failure with his job, but Vialli's international career was over nevertheless. He ended with 16 goals from 59 caps, the last of which came long before the peak of his club career.

That lack of international fulfilment helps to explain the significance of the dramatic and tearful embrace with Mancini after the Euro 2020 victory. Even more than Vialli, Mancini had never really worked out in the national team, despite his obvious outstanding talent. For both men, that triumph at Wembley in the summer of 2021 represented a long-awaited magic moment of resolution, as they finally won something with the *Azzurri*. Their embrace caught the imagination of a grateful Italian public all too keenly aware that throughout the tournament Vialli's health was suffering. It even seemed that maybe the Goal Twins had seen off that particular "travel companion" as Vialli called his cancer.

Yet it was not to be. In December 2021, Vialli revealed that he had been diagnosed with the disease for a second time.

"He played a decisive role in the conquest of the European title," Mancini told *Corriere dello Sport* after the news of Vialli's death broke. "The players loved him. Gianluca brought us a courage that we did not know and that he used to fight the disease."

Throughout the many other tributes that poured in, it was evident that Vialli was revered for his personality as much as his football ability. Graeme Souness, who played with Vialli at Sampdoria, paid tribute to his former team-mate on Sky Sports.

"Forget football for a minute, he was just a gorgeous soul. A truly nice human being," said a tearful Souness. "He was a fabulous player, but I don't want to talk about his football – I want to talk about him as a human being.

"My condolences go to his family and his wife. They've been blessed that their paths have crossed. His kids are blessed to have had a dad like that and his wife is blessed to have married a man like that.

"If you're in his company once, I think you'll remember him for the rest of your life. He was just a special person."

Glenn Moore

Growing pains

Women's football has a problem with ACL injuries

When UEFA delayed the hosting decision for the 2025 Women's Euros to April there may have been a few elite players wondering if the actual finals could be put back a year.

While any international footballer relishes a major tournament, for some it might be too much of a good thing. The 2025 Euros will be the fifth successive summer in which there has been a major international tournament and after two events of that cycle bodies are already breaking down.

The voting for the Ballon d'Or Feminin 2022 revealed five of the top 18 players were out of action with anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injuries, including the top two, Barcelona's Alexia Putellas and, attending the presentation on crutches, Arsenal's Beth Mead.

Mead's team-mate Vivianne Miedema, Catarina Macario and Marie-Antoinette Katoto made up the quintet while seventh-placed Ada Hegerberg, of Lyon and Norway, returned during 2022 after 15 months out.

Every one of those players had suffered an ACL injury, the prevalence of which is much higher in the women's game for reasons that are not fully understood.

A very good team could be put together of players who have damaged an ACL over the past year (see panel). There are even two goalkeepers on that list – Norway's Cecilie Fiskerstrand and Barbora Votikova of the Czech Republic.

It is not just European nations affected either. Australia are currently without Ellie Carpenter and Kyah Simon, while Chloe Logarzo (on loan at Western United from Kansas City Current) recently returned from a year out. There are several US-based players affected too.

Nor are the only serious injuries ACLs. China's Wang Shuang had five months out with an ankle injury, USA's Lynn Williams missed the NWSL season with a hamstring problem, and Lyon's Griedge Mbock Bathy dislocated her knee on international duty.

After that, Lyon said they had asked France to "spare its players" for what were friendlies "given the busy schedule" noting Mbock Bathy had played 40 matches in 12 months.

> "There is simply too much football and it's starting to hurt players"
>
> Magdalena Eriksson

They are not alone in complaining. In a column in the *i* newspaper titled, "There is simply too much football and it's starting to hurt players like me", Sweden's Magdalena Eriksson, captain of Chelsea, criticised FIFA's plan to add yet more matches, with the introduction of a Women's Club World Cup, without consulting the players.

ACL injuries...Arsenal's Vivianne Miedema and Beth Mead have both suffered this season

"Too much football" ...Chelsea captain Magdalena Eriksson

Eriksson's Sweden reached the Olympic final in August 2021 and the Euros semi-final in July 2022. They will be contenders at the Women's World Cup in 2023 and Euro 2025, and may well qualify for the 2024 Olympics.

With 2022 featuring continental championships in Africa, South America, Asia and CONCACAF as well as Europe, there are several nations likely to play in four successive tournaments: USA, Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, Brazil, Australia and England/GB among them, with the Europeans looking at five. Many of these teams have players likely to go deep in the Champions League too.

"If you just add more and more games, there'll come a time when it just becomes too much," Eriksson said, noting she had suffered injuries this season and last brought on by fatigue and overloading.

This, she added, was at a club with a deep squad and full-time medical staff. Many players in the women's game do not have this support.

ACL injuries have been prevalent in women's sport for years. Former Chelsea and England defender Claire Rafferty suffered three during her career. What has changed is that women's football is becoming big business.

This season Arsenal have had three WSL games with attendances in excess of 40,000. Add merchandising, food and drink to ticket prices and they will have taken an estimated £1m each.

That's not £1m profit, not yet, but income is rising sharply. Players have become valuable assets.

This ought to spur more research. Some has been done, but not enough to isolate the causes, or to establish preventative regimes. It is not even clear how much more vulnerable female players are compared to male; studies vary from three times as much to six.

Some likely causes are specific to women's bodies – anatomy, hormonal. Others are environmental – footwear that is not designed for female athletes, poor training facilities and playing surfaces, and lack of medical support.

Another factor, said Eriksson, is that the current generation of women's players may be more "fragile" due to insufficient "medical attention early in our careers". Evidence from the USA suggests school-age girls are notably more at risk than boys.

What also needs looking at is how much a player's position affects prevalence. Half of the players who have been injured in the past year are forwards or attacking midfielders, players who tend to be tackled more often, and who twist and turn more than defensive players.

The silver lining, if one can be found, is that an ACL is no longer the career-ending injury it once was. The World Cup is likely to come too soon for Miedema and Mead, but Putellas and Marta are among the many who will be targeting it.

If they need inspiration it can be found in the shirt-wheeling figure of England's Chloe Kelly, celebrating scoring the winner in the Euro 2022 final. The Manchester City forward suffered an ACL injury in May 2021, returning in April 2022. That was just in time to play herself back into the City team, the England squad, and history.

INTERNATIONAL ACL INJURIES OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS

Ellie Carpenter *(Lyon & Australia)*
Tierna Davidson *(Chicago Red Stars & USA)*
Cecilie Fiskerstrand *(Kvinner & Norway)*
Giulia Gwinn *(Bayern Munich & Germany)*
Jennifer Hermoso *(Barcelona & Spain)*
Marie-Antoinette Katoto *(PSG & France)*
Thembi Kgatlana *(Racing Louisville & South Africa)*
Catarina Macario *(Lyon & USA)*
Simone Magill *(Aston Villa & Northern Ireland)*
Dzsenifer Marozsan *(Lyon & Germany)*
Marta *(Orlando Pride & Brazil)*
Beth Mead *(Arsenal & England)*
Vivianne Miedema *(Arsenal & Netherlands)*
Nadia Nadim *(Racing Louisville & Denmark)*
Ria Percival *(Tottenham & New Zealand)*
Christen Press *(Angel City & USA)*
Alexia Putellas *(Barcelona & Spain)*
Kyah Simon *(Tottenham & Australia)*
Barbora Votikova *(PSG & Czech Republic)*
Jessica Ziu *(West Ham United & Republic of Ireland)*

Round-up

Lifetime ban... former Racing Louisville coach Christy Holly

NWSL ISSUES LIFE BANS

Four former coaches have been banned for life by the NWSL after an investigation, launched in 2021, found "systemic" misconduct in the league – Paul Riley (ex-North Carolina Courage), Rory Dames (ex-Chicago Red Stars), Richie Burke (ex-Washington Spirit) and Christy Holly (ex-Racing Louisville).

Two-year suspensions were issued to Craig Harrington (ex-Utah Royals) and former Gotham general manager Alyse LaHue, while several other coaches were told they could only work in the NWSL if they admitted fault and underwent training.

Six NWSL clubs were fined, notably Chicago Red Stars ($1.5 million) and Portland Thorns ($1m).

EQUAL PAY IN WALES

Wales became the latest country to agree equal payments for national appearances. The deal required the men's team to give up 25 per cent of their pay so the women's team could have a 25 per cent uplift.

PORTUGAL SEE WHITE

A white card was shown to both teams in the Benfica-Sporting cup quarter-final after their medical staffs assisted a fan who had collapsed. It was the first instance of a Portuguese FA initiative to reward fair play. A record women's crowd in Portugal, 15,032, saw Benfica win 5-0.

LYON MADE TO PAY

Iceland international Sara Bjork Gunnarsdottir successfully sued former club Lyon at a FIFA tribunal for more than €80,000 in wages the European

Vindicated...Sara Bjork Gunnarsdottir

champions had withheld while she was pregnant. The midfielder, who now plays for Juventus, was supported by players' union FIFPRO, which agreed maternity regulations with FIFA in January 2021.

FLAHERTY RETIRES

Former England defender Gilly Flaherty has retired at 31, feeling unable to play on after the death of her father. Flaherty scored the WSL's first goal, for Arsenal in 2011, and also played for Chelsea, West Ham and Liverpool, winning the quadruple with the Gunners in 2007 and the double with Chelsea in 2015.

Record signing... Bethany England

SPURS PAY RECORD FEE FOR ENGLAND

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The biggest story on deadline day however, was Manchester United's rejection of Arsenal's world-record bid for England striker Alessia Russo, reported to be almost £500,000.

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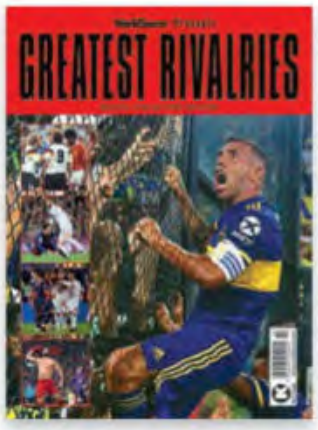

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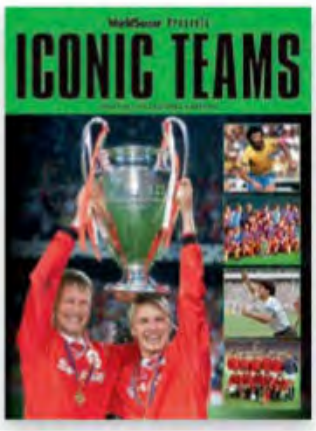

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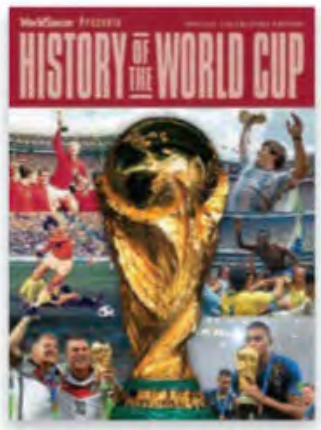

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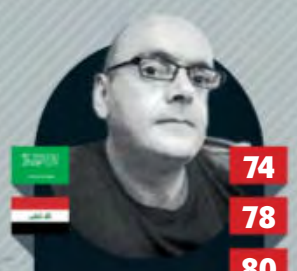
MARTIN DEL PALACIO LANGER
CONCACAF Champions League



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Saudi Arabia

JOHN DUERDEN

Ronaldo in Riyadh

Cristiano Ronaldo's arrival in Saudi Arabia is the latest boost for a rising football power

Big name...a fan poses with a Ronaldo No.7 shirt inside the Al Nassr club shop

Last year was a good one for Saudi Arabian football. The Under-23 team won the Asian Championship for the first time, scoring 13 and conceding none as they defeated hosts Uzbekistan in the Tashkent final. The biggest story, however, seemed clear; the unforgettable victory over eventual winners Argentina in November that kick-started the World Cup into life. But then, on the penultimate day of the year, the Saudi Professional League made headlines around the world.

That is because Al Nassr FC announced that they had signed Cristiano Ronaldo in a deal reportedly worth around £150 million a year. Within a few days on Twitter alone, the post was seen by 30 million people. Just weeks after Manchester United terminated his contract following an explosive television interview in which he criticised the club's manager and owners, the Portuguese forward was being introduced to a sold-out crowd at a packed Mrsool Park stadium in Riyadh. There have been famous players in Asia before – Andres Iniesta in Japan, Didier Drogba in China and Gabriel Batistuta in Qatar – but nothing like this. Weekly magazine *Arabian Business* was soon

advertising for the world's first Ronaldo correspondent.

In terms of helping the Yellows to Saudi Arabian title number ten, the talents of the five-time Ballon d'Or winner, who arrived on a free transfer, may not make a huge difference. Al Nassr were already top when he signed. With clubs limited to eight foreign players, Ronaldo's arrival meant the departure of Cameroon striker Vincent Aboubakar, last seen internationally scoring the winning goal against Brazil at the World Cup. There is still plenty of talent there, including 2018 South American Player of the Year Gonzalo "Pity" Martinez, former Benfica star Anderson Talisca and Colombian goalkeeper David Ospina, as well as ex-Bayern Munich midfielder Luiz Gustavo. Throw in six members of the Saudi Arabia World Cup squad and former Lyon, Marseille and Roma coach Rudi Garcia in charge and you have a set-up that few others in Asia can match.

Ronaldo, with all his experience and titles, may tilt the balance when the pressure is on in the big games, however, such as against Al Hilal. The Riyadh rivals are the defending champions of Saudi Arabia and Asia – they are the most successful team at both country and continental level with 18 and four championships respectively – and have a knack of digging out results even when the chips look to be down. It is a trait that Al Nassr, whose best effort in Asia is reaching the final in 1995, would love to have.

Spotlight... Ronaldo during his first press conference in Riyadh

"[Al Nassr are] a great club, among the three most important in Saudi Arabia and they are going to demand a lot from Cristiano," said Spanish boss Raul Caneda who was in charge of the team from 2014 to 2016. "In Saudi Arabia there are three or four teams that would compete very well in the Spanish first division."

> **There have been famous players in Asia before – Andres Iniesta in Japan, Didier Drogba in China and Gabriel Batistuta in Qatar – but nothing like this**

For Caneda the move confirms Saudi Arabia as the leading football nation in the region, just weeks after Qatar hosted the World Cup. "Qatar has a great financial muscle and some clubs with a football tradition, but Saudi Arabia is the nerve centre of Arab football, and the comparison is similar to that of Spain with Andorra."

Such comments will be music to the ears of Al Nassr president Musalli Al Muammar. "The agreement is not limited to football...it is commercially beneficial for us in terms of profitability," Al Muammar said. "Ronaldo will help achieve more success for the club, Saudi sports, and future generations".

Ronaldo is now an ambassador for Saudi Arabian football and has already lifted the league's profile – as you would expect from the man with Instagram's most popular account at over 530 million followers, more than double all the English Premier league clubs combined. It would be welcome in Riyadh, Jeddah, Dammam and elsewhere if his presence and commercial potential leads to clubs raising their game off the pitch. Inspiring youngsters to play should be easier. Females too, and it was noticeable that Ronaldo immediately mentioned women's football more than once at his first press conference – 2022 saw the women's team play a first-ever international and there is a bid for the 2026 Women's Asian Cup.

And then there is 2030. Riyadh are reportedly interested in the World Cup alongside potential partners in Europe and elsewhere and with the hosts set to be announced in 2024, Ronaldo will be well-used in any potential campaign. First things first though, Al Nassr fans – in the short term – want the player who has won most of the big prizes in Europe to help deliver Saudi Arabian title number ten.

Star-studded team... Al Nassr already have Gonzalo Martinez, Luiz Gustavo and Anderson Talisca on their books

Algeria

MARK GLEESON

Review

Two out of two for Senegal

The Lions of Teranga lift their second title in a year with African Nations Championship (CHAN) victory

Senegal are double African champions – of sorts – after adding the African Nations Championship to the Cup of Nations success one year ago. The first was won with a bevy of European-based stars, led by the talismanic Sadio Mane, but success in this year's CHAN tournament in Algeria came with a squad of unknowns.

The African Nations Championship is for quasi-national teams, made up of home-based players only, and previously won by countries with strong domestic championships. But this is not true of Senegal, whose league and clubs are notorious underachievers.

No Senegalese side has ever won any of the annual African club competitions, never mind even reached a final. Since the African Champions League was launched in 1997, only two Senegalese teams have made it to the group stage – Jeanne d'Arc in 2000, 2002 and 2004 and upstarts Teungueth in 2019.

The export of footballing talent from Senegal is so extensive these days that there is not much left behind. Or supposedly so.

The home-based Senegalese, coached by Pape Thiaw, upset the odds to deny hosts Algeria their expected victory, beating them 5-4 on penalties after the final in early February ended in a goalless draw. Algeria put extensive effort into organising the event, including

Winners...Senegal players celebrate with the trophy

Host nation... Algeria made it to the final

a brand-new stadium named after Nelson Mandela in the suburbs of Algiers.

It was packed for an expected coronation for Madjid Bougherra's side, who had won all three group games (all by a 1-0 scoreline), then beat the Ivory Coast 1-0 in the quarter-finals and Niger 5-0 in the semis.

But Senegal, who lost in the group phase to Uganda but still topped their group, had other ideas as they stymied the home team's creativity, seeing out a torturously tough-to-watch, foul-filled 120 minutes before taking the title in the shootout.

Algeria also contributed to a dire spectacle with a timid approach, looking somewhat fearful under a heavy burden of expectation. Centre-back Ayoub Abdellaoui almost put the ball in his own net and Algeria were poor in utilising their many set-piece chances, except once when, on the stroke of half-time, the tournament's top scorer Aymen Mahious hit the woodwork.

It took nine minutes into extra-time for the first real chance to be created but Algerian defender Zineddine Belaid directed his close-range header straight into the gloves of goalkeeper Pape Sy. It was followed soon after by a volley from Houssem Mrezigue that also did not find the net when it looked likely to do so.

In the shootout, Senegal's Cheikhou Ndiaye hit their third kick onto the crossbar, handing Algeria the advantage. Mahious stepped up to win it for them with the last kick of the first sequence of ten penalties but wilted under the pressure and hit a soft kick at Sy. The shootout then went to sudden death with Ousmane Diouf netting for Senegal before substitute Ahmed Kendouci hit the bar, handing West Africa its first ever CHAN title.

The start of the tournament was overshadowed by Morocco's refusal to participate, in a play for political points against their estranged neighbours. Relations between Algeria and Morocco have been frosty for decades over Morocco's annexation of the former Spanish colony Western Sahara. Algeria recognises, houses and supports Polisario, the liberation movement fighting for Western Saharan independence.

> **The African Nations Championship is for quasi-national teams, made up of home-based players only, and previously won by countries with strong domestic championships. But this is not true of Senegal**

Algeria and Morocco have closed their border since 1994 and there are no direct flights between the two Maghreb countries. For CHAN, in order to circumvent the problem, the Algerian organising committee offered the Morocco team – due to play in Group C – a trip via Tunisia to their group base in Constantine.

But just a week before the tournament kicked off, Morocco demanded their team be allowed to take a charter flight directly from Rabat to Constantine. The symbolism of a Royal Air Maroc plane landing on Algerian territory would have gone down well domestically but the Algerians were not having it, so Morocco simply did not pitch.

The pettiness of the Algeria-Morocco relationship is nothing new. As Morocco's team were advancing to the World Cup semi-finals in Qatar towards the end of last year, Algerian television took them off air.

Morocco are now likely to face sanctions from the Confederation of African Football, but there was no immediate condemnation of their actions and Cairo headquarters are not keen to get into a squabble with one of the few countries prepared to host many of their events.

But their conduct must make Algeria favourites to edge Morocco in a head-to-head battle for the right to host the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations finals. The pair are the candidates vying to replace Guinea and waiting for the decision from CAF's executive committee.

Grounded...the Morocco players made it to the airport in Rabat

Iraq

JOHN DUERDEN

Iraq lift Gulf Cup on home soil

Yet final triumph is overshadowed by tragedy, creating fresh doubts about Iraq's future hosting ability

Standout star... Iraq midfielder Ibrahim Bayesh

The final of the 2023 Gulf Cup summed up the tournament: not much quality but huge excitement nevertheless. Iraq defeated Oman 3-2 after extra-time to become champions of the eight-nation biennial tournament for the first time since 1988. Despite being on home soil and cheered on by 60,000 fans at Basra International Stadium, they made hard work of it.

Ibrahim Bayesh, one of the standout stars, gave Iraq a first-half lead. But, eight minutes from the end, Salah Al Yahyaei missed a penalty that would have levelled matters before making amends with another spot-kick in the tenth minute of stoppage time.

Extra-time was fairly quiet until the latter stages of the second period as Amjad Attwan restored Iraq's lead with just four minutes to go, also from the

Tragedy...an injured supporter is carried to safety during the final in Basra

spot. Wild celebrations were perhaps responsible for Omar Al Malki rising unmarked to head Oman's equaliser after 119 minutes. Yet there was still time for Iraq to score again thanks to a header from Manaf Younis. A nation held its breath as VAR checked the goal but the green light was given and Basra erupted.

It was a thrilling end to a sad day. So intense had been the excitement that fans were trying to get inside the stadium many hours before kick-off. A crush at one of the gates led to at least four deaths and dozens of injuries. It remains to be seen if FIFA sees the incident as a reason to maintain Iraq's ban on playing competitive football at home. The nation is desperate to play World Cup qualifiers in Baghdad for the first time since 2001.

Both Iraq and Oman came through Group A, finishing ahead of Saudi Arabia. That early exit was no surprise given the experimental nature of the Saudi squad, with only two members of the World Cup party included (goalkeeper Nawaf Al Aqidi and midfielder Riyadh Sharahili). Coach Herve Renard also handed the reins to Under-23 boss Saad Al Shehri, and the relative lack of criticism in Riyadh suggests a new maturity in the country that is now seeing the competition as a developmental opportunity.

Their fate was partly sealed by a 2-0 defeat to the hosts, played on a near-waterlogged pitch that produced increasingly farcical scenes as the game progressed, with mud-covered players sliding all over the place and the ball sticking in puddles.

"We could not have won because we rely on possession and individual skill. The water-drenched pitch did not allow that," Al Shehri admitted afterwards.

Yemen finished pointless, though there was a bit more to it than that. A substituted player giving his shinpads to his replacement summed up the challenges facing the country that had never won a game in nine previous appearances at the tournament.

A crush at one of the gates led to at least four deaths and dozens of injuries. It remains to be seen if FIFA sees the incident as a reason to maintain Iraq's ban

They did push Oman all the way, losing 3-2, before getting thrashed 5-0 by a rampant host nation.

After Iraq, perhaps most eyes were on Qatar. Nobody needs reminding of the disastrous three defeats at the World Cup on home soil. This marked the start of the rebuild. Coach Felix Sanchez, who took the job in 2017, did not have his contract renewed. There were criticisms that the Spaniard had been too loyal to the players who had won the 2019 Asian Cup. In came Portuguese manager Bruno Pinheiro, temporarily as the Qatar FA look for a replacement, and a whole host of new talent with the big stars of 2019 – top scorer Almoez Ali and Asian Player of the Year Akram Afif – left at home.

The team were defeated by Iraq in the last four after a mixed group stage with a victory over Kuwait, a defeat to Bahrain and a draw with United Arab Emirates. Jassem Gaber, a 20-year-old centre-back, starred in front of Meshaal Barsham, who seems to have taken custody of the goalkeeping spot after the dismal World Cup performance of Saad Al Sheeb.

Pinheiro was one of three Portuguese coaches in Group B with Bahrain finishing top under Helio Sousa. This was a more proactive version of the team that likes to push forward whenever possible, but the goals dried up in the semi-final as they were defeated by a late stunner from Oman's Jameel Al Yahmadi. Kuwait just missed out on goal difference and showed signs of improvement under Rui Bento, but the Blues were stymied by a lack of goals.

Last and very much least were the United Arab Emirates who had just missed out on the World Cup, losing a tight play-off with Australia. It was expected that coach Rodolfo Arruabarrena would stamp his mark on the team at this tournament especially after the two biggest names in Ali Mabkhout and Omar Abdulrahman were left out. It failed with a team that lacked energy, cohesion and more besides, collecting just a single point.

Iraq had the opposite experience and it may just be a new beginning for football in the country.

Waterlogged...Iraq and Saudi Arabia players compete for the ball

Southeast Asia

JOHN DUERDEN

Thailand win AFF Championship

Thailand become champions of Southeast Asia for the seventh time after defeating Vietnam 3-2 on aggregate in January's final

The 2022 AFF Championship confirmed what many observers of this football-mad region of 650 million people have known for much of the past decade: that Thailand and Vietnam are clearly at the top of the tree. But the burning question remains: can either of them become genuine continental forces and qualify for the 2026 World Cup?

Fans in the Land of Smiles won't be worrying about that just yet as they relish another deserved title. The failure of Southeast Asian teams to get to World Cups or challenge consistently at Asian Cups means that the regional competition is a big deal, although this edition did drag a little, lasting almost as long as the World Cup. Each of the ten teams, split into two groups of five, played two games

Vietnam star...Nguyen Quang Hai in the final

Semi-finalists...Malaysia went a goal up against Thailand in Kuala Lumpur thanks to Faisal Halim

Southeast Asian champs...Thailand captain Theerathon Bunmathan lifts the trophy

at home and two away before two-legged semi-finals and final. With plenty of games and plenty of travel, it was a bit of a slog for players and fans.

Under Brazilian-German coach Alexandre "Mano" Polking, Thailand strolled through Group A to earn a semi-final against Malaysia. A first leg in front of over 60,000 raucous fans in Kuala Lumpur ended 1-0 for the hosts but Thailand were too good for the Tigers at home with a 3-0 win, helped by a sixth goal of the tournament for veteran striker and one-time Manchester City trialist Teerasil Dangda.

Over in Group B, Vietnam finished top without conceding a goal in 360 minutes of football and then defeated Indonesia 2-0 on aggregate to earn that final showdown.

The first leg in Hanoi ended 2-2. Nguyen Tien Linh opened the scoring to send 40,000 Vietnamese fans wild with delight and it looked as if Park Hang-seo's six-year tenure in charge was going to end on a high. Thailand's class did show through as Poramet Arjvirai and Sarach Yooyen put the visitors ahead, but they switched off just before the end and Vietnam equalised through Vu Van Thanh.

Back in Thailand, a stunning shot from tournament MVP Theerathon Bunmathan was enough for a 1-0 win and magnificent title number seven. Now they can plan for 2026.

Vietnam's future is more uncertain. Coach Park, a pragmatic South Korean tactician, introduced more steel, discipline and a winning mentality into an already talented group of players. The period of success has been unprecedented, but there was a feeling that "Uncle Park" had taken the team as far as he could and his decision to step down is the right one. Nguyen Quang Hai, the country's star player, is also the only one in Europe with second-tier French team Pau FC. With not much playing time at his new club, it is perhaps not a surprise that the attacking midfielder was not at his inspirational best for his country.

The burning question remains: can Thailand or Vietnam become genuine continental forces and qualify for the 2026 World Cup?

Beaten semi-finalists Indonesia and Malaysia also have South Korean coaches in Shin Tae-yong and Kim Pan-gon, respectively, and are now established at the level below the finalists, with all four of those nations having qualified for the 2023 Asian Cup. Malaysia have become harder to beat under Kim and as he was without a number of players from the local powerhouse Johor Darul Ta'zim (the club refuses to release their stars for internationals on non-FIFA dates), there was much to encourage, especially after a first-round exit last time around in Singapore in 2021.

The 4-1 victory over neighbours Singapore will live long in the memory for Malaysian supporters, especially as it also condemned Singapore to a fourth group stage exit in the past five tournaments, painful for a team that lifted the trophy four times between 1998 and 2012. At least the Lions were competitive – there was massive disappointment in the Philippines with just three points from four games and a finish below Cambodia.

The six points Cambodia collected was the best-ever performance from the Angkor Warriors. Under general manager Keisuke Honda they have made huge strides, and got to the second round of Asian qualification for the 2022 World Cup. The former Japan international and Milan star has invested in the country's youth development which could bear fruits next time around, but has decided to step down from senior team duties.

Myanmar, Laos and Brunei would love some similar inspiration as they collected a combined total of just two points from their collective 12 games. The headlines however belong to Thailand, a team that now have broader ambitions than the AFF Championship but enjoy winning in their backyard nonetheless.

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CONCACAF

MARTIN DEL PALACIO LANGER

CONCACAF Champions League gets underway

New Champions League campaign begins with 16 clubs ready to battle it out for the continental crown

The CONCACAF Champions League (or "Concachampions", as it is affectionately called in the area), is ready to start its 2023 edition, and it will do so with a notable difference regarding previous editions. For the first time in the last 17 years, the defending champions will not be a Mexican club but an American one.

Or it would be if they were present. However, Seattle Sounders, who brilliantly won the final of the previous edition against Mexican side Pumas UNAM, failed to renew their ticket after a very disappointing season in MLS. The Rave Green couldn't even qualify for the MLS Cup play-offs, finishing 11th in the Western Conference in the regular season.

Nevertheless, the four American representatives have good credentials to try to retain the title for their country. The frontrunners are MLS champions Los Angeles FC, who brilliantly won the 2022 title by beating Philadelphia Union on penalties after one of the most dramatic finals in the league's history, which saw Gareth Bale net an equaliser in the eighth minute of stoppage-time at the end of extra-time.

Steve Cherundolo's side will not be able to count on the Welshman, who announced his retirement after the World Cup in Qatar, but they still have great stars at their disposal. Former Mexico international Carlos Vela and the legendary Italy defender Giorgio Chiellini spearhead a very international roster, which is made up of players from more than a dozen different nationalities.

The other great American candidates for the 2023 edition of the Concachampions are last year's MLS runners-up, Philadelphia Union, with a squad that lacks star power but is more balanced overall. The team's two best players, Argentine striker Julian Carranza and Hungary playmaker Daniel Gazdag, boast a lower profile but have a very good record in MLS.

The United States contingent will be completed by two newcomers, Orlando City, as US Open Cup champions, and Austin FC. Canada's representative will be Vancouver Whitecaps, who also play in MLS.

The teams from the north of the Rio Grande will have to be at their best because the top representative of Mexico, Tigres UANL, have all the credentials to be considered the main favourites in the competition. Led by indefatigable French striker Andre-Pierre Gignac, the 2020 champions are back in the tournament after missing the last two editions.

In order to regain the continental title, Tigres spent $20 million on the signings of Uruguay international Fernando Gorriaran and the Mexican-Argentine striker Nicolas Ibanez, while also chasing Mexican starlet Diego Lainez from Spanish top-flight club Real Betis for another $7m. They join a squad that is already full of Latin American internationals.

Star-studded ... 2023 will be Giorgio Chiellini's first full season with LAFC

Favourites?...Tigres are led by French striker Andre-Pierre Gignac

Preview

Mexican champions... Pachuca are eyeing their sixth Champions League crown

Mexico's Tigres UANL have all the credentials to be considered the main favourites in the competition – led by the indefatigable French striker Andre-Pierre Gignac

The other favourites from Mexico are reigning LigaMX champions Pachuca, whose coach Guillermo Almada has implemented an aggressive pressing style and features players such as Mexican internationals Luis Chavez and Kevin Alvarez. The Aztec pack is completed by Atlas, who will try to recover from a very bad season in the LigaMX after winning two titles in a row, and Leon, who possess a strong mix of Mexicans and South American internationals but have often underwhelmed in the competition.

Central America will have three Honduran clubs: Olimpia, Real Espana and Motagua. Honduras grabbed three of the first four places in the qualifying tournament, the CONCACAF League, which oversaw a changing of the guard. Costa Rica, often the dominating force in the region, only managed to qualify one team, Alajuelense. The other two will be Alianza from El Salvador and Tauro from Panama, while the Caribbean will only have Violette from Haiti, champions of the Caribbean Club Championship.

The draw brought some interesting match-ups. On one side will be the two most powerful Mexican teams, Tigres and Pachuca, who would meet in the quarter-finals if they beat their rivals, Orlando City and Motagua. The winners will likely have to face whoever survives from a probable quarter-final duel between Leon and Austin FC.

On the other side of the draw, the semi-finals could see a repeat of the 2022 MLS season finale between LAFC and Philadelphia Union, although the latter must first overcome a difficult tie against Mexican side Atlas should both progress. The tournament will start with the round of 16 matches, which will be played between March 7 and 16.

THE DRAW

Violette v Austin FC
Tauro v Leon
Tigres UANL v Orlando City
Motagua v Pachuca
Vancouver Whitecaps v Real Espana
Alajuelense v Los Angeles FC
Olimpia v Atlas
Alianza v Philadelphia Union

United States

JAMES NALTON

MLS continues to grow

St Louis City SC become the 29th club to join MLS as the league's size and influence expand

2022 champions ...Los Angeles FC

The 28th season of Major League Soccer gets underway ahead of a potentially era-defining period for the sport in the US and Canada. On the back of appearing at the 2022 World Cup, both nations with clubs in MLS are now looking ahead to 2026 when they will co-host the next World Cup with Mexico.

Just as USA '94 led to the creation of MLS and its inaugural season in 1996, the World Cup's return to these shores 30 years later could have a similarly seismic effect on the sport domestically, which has so far bubbled under the

One to watch... Eduard Lowen in action for new club St Louis City

surface in the region. Football is primed to become a national game alongside the more traditional American sports, but what path this growth takes, and if it happens at all, will be determined within the next few years.

The dynamic within the domestic game will play a big part in this. MLS will hope to be at the forefront, ahead of a burgeoning United Soccer League and the 110-year-old US Open Cup competition. Real growth may only occur when all competitions are working together.

The dynamic of MLS is already changing this season thanks to a new ten-year TV deal signed with Apple. All games will be available to watch on its streaming service in over 100 countries and regions around the world, but behind a paywall set up especially for MLS coverage.

The fact that it is not part of a subscription package that soccer fans might already have suggests fewer eyes on the league from casual viewers, but it provides an opportunity for existing fans who can afford the subscription fee to watch premium coverage of every game (season ticket holders at clubs will be able to access the games for no extra charge).

As well as a new TV deal, there is a new team in MLS this season as the league continues to expand. The addition of St Louis City SC takes the league to 29 teams, 15 in the Eastern Conference and 14 in the West, and in doing so adds a city with a rich soccer history.

That history includes one of the most famous matches in the history of the United States national team: the 1-0 victory over England at the 1950 World Cup, which included five St Louisans in the starting line-up.

The addition of St Louis City SC takes the league to 29 teams, 15 in the Eastern Conference and 14 in the West, and in doing so adds a city with a rich soccer history

The game is so important to American soccer that a book about the success, *The Game of Their Lives* by Geoffrey Douglas, was later made into a film.

The city has been a home for the sport since the late 1800s, boasting numerous professional teams and one of the country's earliest professional leagues, lasting until 1939.

St Louis City SC will write a new chapter in the region's soccer history. Their team will have a Bundesliga feel to them thanks to the work of their sporting director, the German former goalkeeper Lutz Pfannenstiel.

Point to prove... Chicago Fire's Xherdan Shaqiri

Midfielder Eduard Lowen, signed from Hertha Berlin, might be one to look out for in the new squad.

St Louis City SC's introduction to the West sees 2020 expansion side Nashville SC re-join an increasingly strong-looking Eastern Conference.

Last year's Eastern Conference table-toppers, Philadelphia Union, have reinforced squad depth and retained key players. One of them, Daniel Gazdag, is now a Designated Player after signing a new contract, though the Union did lose the promising youth product Paxten Aaronson, younger brother of Leeds United's Brenden, to Eintracht Frankfurt.

Philadelphia Union were defeated in last year's MLS Cup final by 2022 Supporters' Shield winners and Western Conference champions Los Angeles FC. Their Gareth Bale-inspired comeback saw them eventually win the MLS Cup final on penalties, and LAFC will be favourites to defend their crowns in 2023. As is the case every year, though, there is an air of unpredictability to MLS. Tipping winners and losers can be a fool's errand.

No team has won back-to-back MLS Cups since LAFC's local rivals LA Galaxy did so in 2012, and no team has won consecutive Supporters' Shields since the Galaxy in 2011. They will be hoping for a return to those glory days after some difficult, inconsistent years watching the success of their neighbours. They still have Mexican striker Javier "Chicharito" Hernandez around to help them do so.

Elsewhere in the West, Austin FC will be looking for another good showing after an impressive second season in the league. Their strong position in the overall table saw them qualify for the CONCACAF Champions League along with LAFC, Philadelphia Union, US Open Cup winners Orlando City and Canadian Championship winners Vancouver Whitecaps.

Seattle Sounders won't be taking part in the competition, but they might be glad of a break from it. In 2022 they became the first MLS team to win North America's premier continental competition in its current format, but success on the continent affected their league form. The Sounders finished 11th in the West, failing to qualify for the play-offs for the first time since they joined the league in 2009, ending a league-record 13-year run in the post-season. They will be expecting vast improvement in 2023.

In the East, New York City FC remain among the favourites but face a rebuilding job under English coach Nick Cushing having seen the departure of most of their 2021 MLS Cup-winning side during the past year. Brazilian forward Talles Magno, 20, will be looking to step up and make a name for himself.

Some established big-name players will also be aiming to make more of an impact in 2023. Xherdan Shaqiri and Lorenzo Insigne arrived in the league last year with Chicago Fire and Toronto FC respectively, and big things will be expected now they have settled.

Unpredictability remains in a sporting sense, while MLS could look a lot different in 2023 due to the change in broadcaster and the way it is presented around the world.

The addition of St Louis adds a storied city, and the way these stories are told, and to how many people, between now and 2026 will go some way toward shaping the future of the game in the United States and Canada.

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlanta United
CF Montreal
Charlotte FC
Chicago Fire
Columbus Crew
D.C. United
FC Cincinnati
Inter Miami
Nashville SC
New England Revolution
New York City FC
New York Red Bulls
Orlando City
Philadelphia Union
Toronto FC

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Austin FC
Colorado Rapids
FC Dallas
Houston Dynamo
LA Galaxy
Los Angeles FC
Minnesota United
Portland Timbers
Real Salt Lake
San Jose Earthquakes
Seattle Sounders
Sporting Kansas City
St Louis City SC
Vancouver Whitecaps

Japan

MIKE PLASTOW

New J. League season

Yokohama F. Marinos will defend their league championship in a wide-open title race in 2023

The 2023 J. League kicks off with the clash of the titans. Kawasaki Frontale, champions four times in the past six seasons, host the new defending champions, Yokohama F. Marinos, on the opening night of Friday, February 17, with the rest of the league commencing over the rest of that weekend.

Yokohama head coach Kevin Muscat is looking for more of the same entertaining, attacking football that worked so well for the club in 2022 and must have been a lot of fun to play as well as to watch.

Yokohama come into 2023 with three big gaps to fill. Tomoki Iwata, the resourceful defender and 2022 J. League Player of the Year, has become the latest J. League star to follow Yokohama's former manager Ange Postecoglou to Celtic. Two forwards have also left: Teruhito Nakagawa, the 2019 J. League Player of the Year, to FC Tokyo; and Leo Ceara, Yokohama's joint-top scorer last season with 11 goals, to Cerezo Osaka.

Those gaps sound big but may not matter so much to Muscat's talented Yokohama squad; both Leo Ceara and Nakagawa were restricted to substitute appearances in the second half of 2022. Iwata will be harder to replace, but Yokohama have plenty of quality at the back, including J. League stalwarts Eduardo, Shinnosuke Hatanaka and Yuki Saneto.

Kawasaki have also lost their captain and centre-back, Shogo Taniguchi, who decided to stay in Qatar following his impressive performances at the World Cup, joining Qatar Stars League club Al Rayyan. Manager Toru Oniki has, however, got used to coping with the loss of star players every year, and Taniguchi's departure is simply the latest in a long line of high-profile departures – the continuing price that Kawasaki pay for their success.

Holders...2022 J. League champions Yokohama F. Marinos kick off the season against title rivals Kawasaki Frontale

ABOVE: Champions League finalists... Urawa Red Diamonds hope to compete for the J. League crown

ABOVE RIGHT: "Vietnamese Messi"... Nguyen Cong Phuong

Kawasaki moved quickly to replace Taniguchi by snapping up Takuma Ominami from Kashiwa Reysol. Ominami can play either as a centre-back or at full-back and made his senior debut for Japan in last year's East Asian Football Championship. Kawasaki have also signed influential attacking midfielder Yusuke Segawa from Shonan Bellmare.

FC Tokyo improved well through the second half of last season and may be the top challengers to watch in 2023 under Spanish manager Albert Puig, now in his second year in charge.

Japan's veteran World Cup full-back Yuto Nagatomo is the biggest name at Tokyo, and proved in Qatar that he still has plenty to offer at 36. The player who could make all the difference this season, however, is the creative 19-year-old attacking midfielder Kuryu Matsuki, who joined Tokyo out of high school last season and became a regular starter from day one.

No Tokyo club has ever won the J. League but FC Tokyo now have quality in every position, from Polish goalkeeper Jakub Slowik at the back to the largely Brazilian strikeforce of Diego Oliveira, Leandro, Adailton and new signing Perotti on loan from Chapecoense.

The other challengers are likely to include League Cup winners Sanfrecce Hiroshima, League Cup runners-up Cerezo Osaka, and 2022 Asian Champions League finalists Urawa Reds (the two-legged final will take place in April/May 2023). In the topsy-turvy world of J. League dark horses, however, almost any team could come through.

Michael Skibbe starts his second season at the helm in Hiroshima with much the same squad as last season, but Cerezo manager Akio Kogiku has revamped his foreign line-up for his own second full season in charge. In addition to Leo Ceara from Yokohama, Cerezo have signed Belgian defender Jordy Croux from Avispa Fukuoka and Brazilian striker Capixaba from Juventude.

Urawa Red Diamonds start 2023 under a new manager, Maciej Skorza, who has spent almost his entire career in the Polish league and brings three Polish coaches with him. Their mission is to lift Urawa out of the mid-table doldrums to challenge again for the Japanese as well as the Asian title. Two Dutch strikers, Alex Schalk and Bryan Linssen, will spearhead the attack, supported again by Swedish attacking midfielder David Moberg.

Andres Iniesta, now 38 and starting his sixth season at ambitious Vissel Kobe, would dearly love to add the J. League title to the Emperor's Cup he won there in 2019, but Kobe toyed with relegation for most of last season and must again be regarded as a very long shot.

The continuing near absence of big-name foreign signings since Iniesta has all of psychological, financial and developmental causes in roughly equal measure.

In the topsy-turvy world of J. League dark horses, however, almost any team could come through

On the psychological and financial sides, the COVID-19 pandemic got the clubs thinking more locally due to travel restrictions and lower earnings. Fifteen out of 20 first division teams reported small but unwelcome deficits in operating income in the 2021 financial year, the latest figures available. More than ever, sound management has become the order of the day.

That situation has been compounded on the football development side by the fact that the foreign players they can afford are not hugely better than the Japanese and foreign players they have already. As with Leo Ceara and Croux, the tendency with foreign signings these days is for J. League clubs to go for players they know from their own league.

Other foreign players moving between clubs this year include Kasper Junker from Urawa to Nagoya Grampus, Diego from Sagan Tosu to Kashiwa Reysol (his fifth Japanese club), Jean Patrick from Cerezo to Kobe, and Patric from Gamba Osaka to Kyoto Sanga.

The export business, on the other hand, remains brisk. Aside from Iwata and Taniguchi, Kashima Antlers' influential defensive midfielder Kento Misao has left for Portuguese club Santa Clara. It seems only a matter of time before such rising prospects as Matsuki, Joel Fujita (Yokohama F. Marinos) and 2022 Young Player of the Year Mao Hosoya (Kashiwa) follow suit.

This year's other more interesting signings include Sagan Tosu's acquisition of Kenya midfielder Teddy Akumu from Kaizer Chiefs of South Africa; the arrival of Tunisia striker Issam Jebali at Gamba from Danish outfit Odense; and Nguyen Cong Phuong, the "Vietnamese Messi", who joins newly-promoted Yokohama FC from Ho Chi Minh City. Nguyen was previously in Japan with Mito Hollyhock.

The continuing expansion of Japan's professional football league, which kicked off with ten teams in 1993, brings changes to promotion and relegation this season in preparation for a new league format in 2024. The J. League has decided to halt its expansion at the current total of 60 clubs and streamline the three divisions to 20 clubs in each from 2024.

As a result, only the bottom club will go down from this year's 18-team first division and three will promoted from the 22-team second division. Promotion and relegation will also be introduced for the first time this season between the third division and fourth tier Japan Football League. Also in 2024, the J. League Cup will become a straight knockout tournament for all 60 J. League clubs.

Brunei

STEVE MENARY

Starting from grassroots

Brunei's footballing structure is slowly being rebuilt after being decimated by COVID

AFF Cup...Brunei players line up ahead of their match against the Philippines

A first AFF Cup appearance in 26 years proved painful for Brunei, but the tiny nation from the island of Borneo is looking to use the tournament to kick-start development.

The ASEAN Football Federation's tournament is for 12 countries in South East Asia. Brunei appeared in the first event in 1996 but did not return until the latest AFF Cup.

After beating Timor Leste 6-3 on aggregate in a qualifier, Brunei faced three opening games in six days in Group A against regional heavyweights – a tough proposition for a side lacking regular match experience. Three late goals consigned them to a 5-0 defeat in their opener against Thailand, and another five were shipped against the Philippines with Razimie Ramlli getting a consolation, before a sobering 7-0 thrashing from Indonesia.

Technical director Paul Munster said: "In the first half, we knew we would be able to compete with performance and physicality against the superior teams; the second half we knew the level would drop and it is totally understandable.

"There has been no league in over two years due to COVID-19, so the players have only been training and playing a cup competition which is clearly not enough to reach AFF level."

> "There has been no league in over two years due to COVID-19, so the players have only been training and playing a cup competition"
>
> Brunei's technical director Paul Munster

Sobering defeats... Philippines striker Kenshiro Daniels scores against Brunei

Brunei's Spanish coach Mario Rivera, who coached the island's Under-21 team in 2017-18, gave game time to all the squad's players to increase experience and the final game showed some improvement.

Nur Ikhwan Othman put Brunei ahead against Cambodia and the scores were level at half-time. The level dropped again in the second half and Cambodia won 5-1 but Munster is drawing positives from the experience. "You could see with each game there was improvements and all players got game time," says Munster. "Now the players understand what it takes to compete at this level."

Taking part is a big step forward for Brunei, whose peripatetic involvement with the AFF Cup was partly due to FIFA suspensions a few years ago.

Nur Ikhwan, Razimie and most of the squad had played for Brunei side DPMM, which competed in the Singapore league until 2019, when the club won the title. The onset of COVID-19 ended that involvement and led to the suspension of the Brunei league. The lack of playing opportunities were evident in the AFF Cup and drove home the need to restart the league to kick-start development.

Munster adds: "The league [needs] to start, that's most important. Then the foreign coaches can come in to improve the players in their tactical understanding, technical ability and physical condition. This is also important for the local coaches to learn from the head coach."

The local league was focused on Muara, but is being expanded to 16 teams. Buses are being organised to bring in players from the other three districts in Tutong, Belait and Temburong. On resumption, two U21 players must start every local league game and can only be replaced by U21 players.

Munster has also been visiting schools to establish a pathway. "We are starting from grassroots," concludes Munster. "We have many talented players that need to play senior football, so we need a pathway for our young players."

With Brunei also targeting a consecutive AFF appearance, those players will also get the chance to play at the highest senior level.

FEBRUARY 17-MARCH 18

Global diary

Games and dates to pencil in for the month ahead

Women's World Cup warm-ups

Ahead of this summer's World Cup, the leading contenders are preparing by taking part in mini-tournaments around the globe in February. The United States will defend the SheBelieves Cup, with Japan, Brazil and Canada joining them. In Australia, the World Cup co-hosts will take on the Czech Republic, Spain and Jamaica in the Cup of Nations, while France welcome Denmark, Uruguay and Norway for the Tournoi de France.

Dominant... USA have won five out of seven editions of the SheBelieves Cup

Cup magic

Both England and Scotland's League Cup finals take place on Sunday, February 26, with Newcastle United facing Manchester United at Wembley, and Rangers and Celtic going head-to-head at Hampden Park.

Just a few days later it's the fifth round of the FA Cup, with fixtures including Bristol City v Manchester City and Leicester City v Blackburn Rovers. A place in the quarter-finals is up for grabs for the teams involved, which take place on the weekend of March 18. Meanwhile, at the start of March, the Spanish Copa del Rey semi-final first legs (Osasuna v Athletic Bilbao and Real Madrid v Barcelona) take place, along with the French Cup quarter-finals.

The Classics

The next few weeks will see the biggest historic fixtures in France, England and Spain. PSG and Marseille kick things off on February 26 with *Le Classique*, and then in England it's Liverpool v Manchester United on March 5, before Camp Nou hosts *El Clasico* on the weekend of March 18 – sandwiched between their Copa del Rey ties.

La Liga v Premier League

It's the stuff of dreams for Real Madrid president Florentino Perez and the other European Super League advocates: the two biggest clubs in England and Spain going toe-to-toe in the space of one month. Liverpool face Real Madrid in their Champions League last-16 clash on February 21, two days before Barcelona travel to Old Trafford for the second leg of their Europa League knockout-round play-off tie with Manchester United.

Rematch...Karim Benzema and Virgil van Dijk during last season's Champions League final

5 unmissable matches

- **England Women v Belgium Women, February 22**
  The final match of the Arnold Clark Cup takes place at Bristol City's Ashton Gate stadium. Can The Lionesses defend their crown ahead of this summer's World Cup?

- **Real Madrid v Atletico Madrid, February 26**
  With Diego Simeone facing increasing scrutiny over his future, this could be the long-serving Atletico manager's final Madrid derby. The Argentine has only beaten Real once in the last ten meetings in all competitions.

Under the spotlight...Diego Simeone

- **Napoli v Lazio, March 3**
  As they march towards the Serie A title, Napoli will be visited by the last man to take them so close to the *Scudetto*: Maurizio Sarri. The Lazio head coach is on a five-game losing streak against his former club.

- **Schalke v Borussia Dortmund, March 11**
  Unfortunately for Schalke, the *Revierderby* has been particularly one-sided in Dortmund's favour over recent seasons. Ending their five-game winless run against their biggest rivals would be a huge boost in their relegation battle.

- **Chelsea Women v Manchester United Women, March 12**
  By the end of January, these two were first and second in the Women's Super League table, so this meeting could be decisive in the title race. For holders Chelsea it is the start of a vital period: they follow this game with the Champions League quarter-finals, then a trip to Manchester City.

GERMANY: BUNDESLIGA 2022-23

AUGSBURG

GOALKEEPERS

1	Rafael **GIKIEWICZ** (Pol)	(35) 26.10.87
25	Daniel **KLEIN**	(21) 13.03.01
39	Benjamin **LENEIS**	(23) 08.03.99
40	Tomas **KOUBEK** (Cze)	(30) 26.08.92

DEFENDERS

2	Robert **GUMNY** (Pol)	(24) 04.06.98
3	Mads **PEDERSEN** (Den)	(26) 01.09.96
6	Jeffrey **GOUWELEEUW** (Ned)	(31) 10.07.91
19	Felix **UDUOKHAI**	(25) 09.09.97
22	**IAGO** (Bra)	(25) 23.03.97
23	Maximilian **BAUER**	(23) 09.02.00
38	David **COLINA** (Cro)	(22) 19.07.00
42	Aaron **ZEHNTER**	(18) 31.10.04

MIDFIELDERS

4	Reece **OXFORD** (Eng)	(24) 16.12.98
5	Tobias **STROBL**	(32) 12.05.90
8	Renato **VEIGA** (Por)	(19) 29.07.03
10	Arne **MAIER**	(24) 08.01.99
13	Elvis **REXHBECAJ**	(25) 01.11.97
14	Julian **BAUMGARTLINGER** (Aut)	(35) 02.01.88
16	Ruben **VARGAS** (Sui)	(24) 05.08.98
17	Noah **SARENREN BAZEE** (Nga)	(26) 21.08.96
20	Daniel **CALIGIURI** (Ita)	(35) 15.01.88
24	Fredrik **JENSEN** (Fin)	(25) 09.09.97
27	Arne **ENGELS** (Bel)	(19) 08.09.03
28	Andre **HAHN**	(32) 13.08.90
30	Niklas **DORSCH**	(25) 15.01.98

FORWARDS

7	Dion Drena **BELJO** (Cro)	(20) 01.03.02
9	Ermedin **DEMIROVIC** (Bih)	(24) 25.03.98
11	Mergim **BERISHA**	(24) 11.05.98
33	Sergio **CORDOVA** (Ven)	(25) 09.08.97
34	Nathanael **MBUKU** (Fra)	(23) 16.03.02
45	Kelvin **YEBOAH** (Ita)	(22) 06.05.00
48	Irvin **CARDONA** (Fra)	(25) 08.08.97

COACH

Enrico **MAASSEN**	(38) 10.03.84

BAYER LEVERKUSEN

GOALKEEPERS

1	Lukas **HRADECKY** (Fin)	(33) 24.11.89
28	Patrick **PENTZ** (Aut)	(26) 02.01.97
36	Niklas **LOMB**	(29) 28.07.93
40	Andrey **LUNEV** (Rus)	(31) 13.11.91

DEFENDERS

3	Piero **HINCAPIE** (Ecu)	(21) 09.01.02
4	Jonathan **TAH**	(26) 11.02.96
5	Mitchel **BAKKER** (Ned)	(22) 20.06.00
6	Odilon **KOSSOUNOU** (Civ)	(22) 04.01.01
12	Edmond **TAPSOBA** (Bfa)	(23) 02.02.99
22	Daley **SINKGRAVEN** (Ned)	(27) 04.07.95
24	Timothy **FOSU-MENSAH** (Ned)	(25) 02.01.98
30	Jeremie **FRIMPONG** (Ned)	(22) 10.12.00

MIDFIELDERS

8	Robert **ANDRICH**	(28) 22.09.94
10	Kerem **DEMIRBAY**	(29) 03.07.93
11	Nadiem **AMIRI**	(26) 27.10.96
18	Noah **MBAMBA** (Bel)	(18) 05.01.05
20	Charles **ARANGUIZ** (Chi)	(33) 17.04.89
25	Exequiel **PALACIOS** (Arg)	(24) 05.10.98
27	Florian **WIRTZ**	(19) 03.05.03
32	Ayman **AZHIL**	(21) 10.04.01
35	Joshua **EZE**	(19) 20.03.03

FORWARDS

9	Sardar **AZMOUN** (Irn)	(28) 01.01.95
14	Patrik **SCHICK** (Cze)	(27) 24.01.96
17	Callum **HUDSON-ODOI** (Eng)	(22) 07.11.00
19	Moussa **DIABY** (Fra)	(23) 07.07.99
21	Amine **ADLI** (Fra)	(22) 10.05.00
23	Adam **HLOZEK** (Cze)	(20) 25.07.02
38	Karim **BELLARABI**	(32) 08.04.90

COACH

Xabi **ALONSO** (Spa)	(41) 25.11.81

BAYERN MUNICH

GOALKEEPERS

1	Manuel **NEUER**	(36) 27.03.86
26	Sven **ULREICH**	(34) 03.08.88
27	Yann **SOMMER** (Sui)	(34) 17.12.88
35	Johannes **SCHENK**	(20) 13.01.03

DEFENDERS

2	Dayot **UPAMECANO** (Fra)	(24) 27.10.98
4	Matthijs **DE LIGT** (Ned)	(23) 12.08.99
5	Benjamin **PAVARD** (Fra)	(26) 28.03.96
19	Alphonso **DAVIES** (Can)	(22) 02.11.00
20	Bouna **SARR** (Sen)	(31) 31.01.92
21	Lucas **HERNANDEZ** (Fra)	(27) 14.02.96
22	Joao **CANCELO** (Por)	(28) 27.05.94
23	Daley **BLIND** (Ned)	(32) 09.03.90
37	Gabriel **MARUSIC** (Cro)	(19) 03.03.03
40	Noussair **MAZRAOUI** (Mar)	(25) 14.11.97
44	Josip **STANISIC** (Cro)	(22) 02.04.00

MIDFIELDERS

6	Joshua **KIMMICH**	(27) 08.02.95
8	Leon **GORETZKA**	(27) 06.02.95
14	Paul **WANNER**	(17) 23.12.05
38	Ryan **GRAVENBERCH** (Ned)	(20) 16.05.02
42	Jamal **MUSIALA**	(19) 26.02.03
46	Arijon **IBRAHIMOVIC**	(17) 11.12.05

FORWARDS

7	Serge **GNABRY**	(27) 14.07.95
10	Leroy **SANE**	(27) 11.01.96
11	Kingsley **COMAN** (Fra)	(26) 13.06.96
13	Eric Maxim **CHOUPO-MOTING** (Cmr)	(33) 23.03.89
17	Sadio **MANE** (Sen)	(30) 10.04.92
25	Thomas **MULLER**	(33) 13.09.89
39	Mathys **TEL** (Fra)	(17) 27.04.05

COACH

Julian **NAGELSMANN**	(35) 23.07.87

BOCHUM

GOALKEEPERS

1	Manuel **RIEMANN**	(34) 09.09.88
21	Michael **ESSER**	(35) 22.11.87
26	Marko **JOHANSSON** (Swe)	(24) 25.08.98
34	Paul **GRAVE**	(21) 10.04.01

DEFENDERS

2	Cristian **GAMBOA** (Crc)	(33) 24.10.89
3	Danilo **SOARES** (Bra)	(31) 29.10.91
4	Erhan **MASOVIC** (Srb)	(24) 22.11.98
16	Kostas **STAFYLIDIS** (Gre)	(29) 02.12.93
18	Jordi **OSEI-TUTU** (Eng)	(24) 02.10.98
20	Ivan **ORDETS** (Ukr)	(30) 08.07.92
23	Saidy **JANKO** (Gmb)	(27) 22.10.95
24	Vasileios **LAMPROPOULOS** (Gre)	(32) 31.03.90
25	Mohammed **TOLBA**	(18) 19.07.04
30	Dominique **HEINTZ**	(29) 15.08.93
31	Keven **SCHLOTTERBECK**	(25) 28.04.97

MIDFIELDERS

5	Jacek **GORALSKI** (Pol)	(30) 21.09.92
6	Patrick **OSTERHAGE**	(23) 01.02.00
7	Kevin **STOGER** (Aut)	(29) 27.08.93
8	Anthony **LOSILLA** (Fra)	(36) 10.03.86
10	Philipp **FORSTER**	(27) 04.02.95
22	Christopher **ANTWI-ADJEI** (Gha)	(29) 07.02.94
28	Pierre **KUNDE** (Cmr)	(27) 26.07.95

FORWARDS

9	Simon **ZOLLER**	(31) 26.06.91
11	Takuma **ASANO** (Jpn)	(28) 10.11.94
17	Gerrit **HOLTMANN** (Phl)	(27) 25.03.95
29	Moritz **BROSCHINSKI**	(22) 23.09.00
33	Philipp **HOFMANN**	(29) 30.03.93
35	Silvere **GANVOULA** (Cog)	(26) 29.06.96

COACH

Thomas **LETSCH**	(54) 26.08.68

Loan...Bochum signed Cameroon midfielder Pierre Kunde in January

BOR. DORTMUND

GOALKEEPERS

1	Gregor **KOBEL** (Sui)	(25) 06.12.97
33	Alexander **MEYER**	(31) 13.04.91
35	Marcel **LOTKA** (Pol)	(21) 25.05.01
38	Luca **UNBEHAUN**	(21) 27.02.01

DEFENDERS

2	Mateu **MOREY** (Spa)	(22) 02.03.00
4	Nico **SCHLOTTERBECK**	(23) 01.12.99
13	Raphael **GUERREIRO** (Por)	(29) 22.12.93
14	Nico **SCHULZ**	(29) 01.04.93
15	Mats **HUMMELS**	(34) 16.12.88
24	Thomas **MEUNIER** (Bel)	(31) 12.09.91
25	Niklas **SULE**	(27) 03.09.95
26	Julian **RYERSON** (Nor)	(25) 17.11.97
36	Tom **ROTHE**	(18) 29.10.04
44	Soumaila **COULIBALY** (Fra)	(19) 14.10.03
47	Antonios **PAPADOPOULOS** (Gre)	(23) 10.09.99

MIDFIELDERS

6	Salih **OZCAN** (Tur)	(25) 11.01.98
8	Mahmoud **DAHOUD**	(27) 01.01.96
17	Marius **WOLF**	(27) 27.05.95
19	Julian **BRANDT**	(26) 02.05.96
22	Jude **BELLINGHAM** (Eng)	(19) 29.06.03
23	Emre **CAN**	(29) 12.01.94
30	Felix **PASSLACK**	(24) 29.05.98
32	Abdoulaye **KAMARA** (Gui)	(18) 06.11.04
42	Goktan **GURPUZ** (Tur)	(20) 22.01.03

FORWARDS

7	Giovanni **REYNA** (USA)	(20) 13.11.02
9	Sebastien **HALLER** (Civ)	(28) 22.06.94
11	Marco **REUS**	(33) 31.05.89
16	Julien **DURANVILLE** (Bel)	(16) 05.05.06
18	Youssoufa **MOUKOKO**	(18) 20.11.04
20	Anthony **MODESTE** (Fra)	(34) 14.04.88
21	Donyell **MALEN** (Ned)	(24) 19.01.99
27	Karim **ADEYEMI**	(21) 18.01.02
43	Jamie **BYNOE-GITTENS** (Eng)	(18) 08.08.04
46	Marco **PASALIC** (Cro)	(22) 14.09.00
49	Justin **NJINMAH**	(22) 15.11.00

COACH

Edin **TERZIC**	(40) 30.10.82

BOR. M'GLADBACH

GOALKEEPERS

1	Jonas **OMLIN** (Sui)	(29) 10.01.94
21	Tobias **SIPPEL**	(34) 22.03.88
41	Jan **OLSCHOWSKY**	(21) 18.11.01

DEFENDERS

3	Ko **ITAKURA** (Jpn)	(25) 27.01.97
4	Mamadou **DOUCOURE** (Fra)	(24) 21.05.98
5	Marvin **FRIEDRICH**	(27) 13.12.95
18	Stefan **LAINER** (Aut)	(30) 27.08.92
20	Luca **NETZ**	(19) 15.05.03
24	Tony **JANTSCHKE**	(32) 07.04.90
25	Ramy **BENSEBAINI** (Alg)	(27) 16.04.95
29	Joe **SCALLY** (USA)	(20) 31.12.02
30	Nico **ELVEDI** (Sui)	(26) 30.09.96

MIDFIELDERS

6	Christoph **KRAMER**	(32) 19.02.91
8	Julian **WEIGL**	(27) 08.09.95
11	Hannes **WOLF** (Aut)	(23) 16.04.99
13	Lars **STINDL**	(34) 26.08.88
17	Manu **KONE** (Fra)	(21) 17.05.01
19	Nathan **NGOUMOU** (Fra)	(22) 14.03.00
22	Oscar **FRAULO** (Den)	(19) 06.12.03
23	Jonas **HOFMANN**	(30) 14.07.92
32	Florian **NEUHAUS**	(25) 16.03.97
34	Conor **NOSS** (Irl)	(22) 01.01.01

FORWARDS

7	Patrick **HERRMANN**	(32) 12.02.91
10	Marcus **THURAM** (Fra)	(25) 06.08.97
14	Alassane **PLEA** (Fra)	(29) 10.03.93
38	Yvandro **BORGES SANCHES** (Lux)	(18) 24.05.04

COACH

Daniel **FARKE**	(46) 30.10.76

COLOGNE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Timo **HORN**	(29) 12.05.93
20	Marvin **SCHWABE**	(27) 25.04.95
44	Matthias **KOBBING**	(25) 28.05.97
	Julian **ROLOFF**	(22) 17.01.01

DEFENDERS

2	Benno **SCHMITZ**	(28) 17.11.94
3	Kristian **PEDERSEN** (Den)	(28) 04.08.94
4	Timo **HUBERS**	(26) 20.07.96
5	Nikola **SOLDO** (Cro)	(22) 25.01.01
14	Jonas **HECTOR**	(32) 27.05.90
15	Luca **KILIAN**	(23) 01.09.99
24	Jeff **CHABOT**	(25) 12.02.98
38	Elias **BAKATUKANDA**	(18) 13.04.04
46	Rijad **SMAJIC** (Bih)	(18) 02.05.04
48	Georg **STRAUCH**	(21) 30.03.01

MIDFIELDERS

6	Eric **MARTEL**	(20) 29.04.02
7	Dejan **LJUBICIC** (Aut)	(25) 08.10.97
8	Denis **HUSEINBASIC**	(21) 03.07.01
11	Florian **KAINZ** (Aut)	(30) 24.10.92
17	Kingsley **SCHINDLER**	(29) 12.07.93
19	Dimitrios **LIMNIOS** (Gre)	(22) 17.01.01
28	Ellyes **SKHIRI** (Tun)	(27) 10.05.95
29	Jan **THIELMANN**	(20) 26.05.02
37	Linton **MAINA**	(23) 23.06.99
45	Joshua **SCHWIRTEN**	(21) 07.01.02
47	Mathias **OLESEN** (Lux)	(21) 21.03.01

FORWARDS

9	Sebastian **ANDERSSON** (Swe)	(31) 15.07.91
13	Mark **UTH**	(31) 24.08.91
21	Steffen **TIGGES**	(24) 31.07.98
23	Sargis **ADAMYAN** (Arm)	(29) 23.05.93
25	Tim **LEMPERLE**	(21) 05.02.02
27	Davie **SELKE**	(28) 20.01.95
33	Florian **DIETZ**	(24) 03.08.98
43	Maximilian **SCHMID**	(19) 05.03.03
49	Justin **DIEHL**	(18) 27.11.04

COACH

Steffen **BAUMGART**	(51) 05.01.72

EINTRACHT FRANKFURT

GOALKEEPERS

1	Kevin **TRAPP**	(32) 08.07.90
31	Jens **GRAHL**	(34) 22.09.88
40	Diant **RAMAJ**	(21) 19.09.01
41	Simon **SIMONI** (Alb)	(18) 14.07.04

DEFENDERS

2	Evan **NDICKA** (Fra)	(23) 20.08.99
5	Hrvoje **SMOLCIC** (Cro)	(22) 17.08.00
18	Almamy **TOURE** (Mli)	(26) 28.04.96
20	Makoto **HASEBE** (Jpn)	(39) 18.01.84
24	Aurelio **BUTA** (Por)	(26) 10.02.97
25	Christopher **LENZ**	(28) 22.09.94
43	Philipp **MAX**	(29) 30.09.93
35	**TUTA** (Bra)	(23) 04.07.99
49	Jan **SCHROEDER**	(19) 15.04.03

MIDFIELDERS

6	Kristijan **JAKIC** (Cro)	(25) 14.05.97
8	Djibril **SOW** (Sui)	(26) 06.02.97
15	Daichi **KAMADA** (Jpn)	(26) 05.08.96
17	Sebastian **RODE**	(32) 11.10.90
22	Timothy **CHANDLER** (USA)	(32) 29.03.90
26	Junior **DINA EBIMBE** (Fra)	(22) 21.11.00
27	Mario **GOTZE**	(30) 03.06.92
28	Marcel **WENIG**	(18) 04.05.04
29	Jesper **LINDSTROM** (Den)	(22) 29.02.00
30	Paxten **AARONSON** (USA)	(19) 26.08.03
45	Mehdi **LOUNE**	(18) 14.05.04

FORWARDS

9	Randal **KOLO MUANI** (Fra)	(24) 05.12.98
11	Faride **ALIDOU**	(21) 18.07.01
19	Rafael **BORRE** (Col)	(27) 15.09.95
21	Lucas **ALARIO** (Arg)	(30) 08.10.92
36	Ansgar **KNAUFF**	(21) 10.01.02

COACH

Oliver **GLASNER** (Aut)	(48) 28.08.74

FREIBURG

GOALKEEPERS

1	Benjamin **UPHOFF**	(29) 08.08.93
21	Noah **ATUBOLU**	(20) 25.05.02
26	Mark **FLEKKEN** (Ned)	(29) 13.06.93

DEFENDERS

3	Philipp **LIENHART** (Aut)	(26) 11.07.96
5	Manuel **GULDE**	(32) 12.02.91
17	Lukas **KUBLER**	(30) 30.08.92
24	Kimberly **EZEKWEM**	(21) 19.06.01
25	Kiliann **SILDILLIA** (Fra)	(20) 16.05.02
28	Matthias **GINTER**	(29) 19.01.94
30	Christian **GUNTER**	(29) 28.02.93
35	Kenneth **SCHMIDT**	(20) 03.06.02

MIDFIELDERS

7	Jonathan **SCHMID** (Fra)	(32) 22.06.90
8	Maximilian **EGGESTEIN**	(26) 08.12.96
11	Daniel-Kofi **KYEREH** (Gha)	(26) 08.03.96
14	Yannik **KEITEL**	(23) 15.02.00
22	Roland **SALLAI** (Hun)	(25) 22.05.97
23	Robert **WAGNER**	(19) 14.07.03
27	Nicolas **HOFLER**	(32) 09.03.90
29	**JEONG** Woo-yeong (Kor)	(23) 20.09.99
32	Vincenzo **GRIFO** (Ita)	(29) 07.04.93
33	Noah **WEISSHAUPT**	(21) 20.09.01
34	Merlin **ROHL**	(20) 05.07.02
42	Ritsu **DOAN** (Jpn)	(24) 16.06.98

FORWARDS

9	Lucas **HOLER**	(28) 10.07.94
18	Nils **PETERSEN**	(34) 06.12.88
38	Michael **GREGORITSCH** (Aut)	(28) 18.04.94

COACH

Christian **STREICH**	(57) 11.06.65

HERTHA BERLIN

GOALKEEPERS

1	Oliver **CHRISTENSEN** (Den)	(23) 22.03.99
12	Tjark **ERNST**	(19) 15.03.03
22	Rune **JARSTEIN** (Nor)	(38) 29.09.84

DEFENDERS

2	Peter **PEKARIK** (Svk)	(36) 30.10.86
3	Agustin **ROGEL** (Uru)	(25) 17.10.97
5	Filip **UREMOVIC** (Cro)	(25) 11.02.97
16	Jonjoe **KENNY** (Eng)	(25) 15.03.97
17	Maximilian **MITTELSTADT**	(25) 18.03.97
20	Marc-Oliver **KEMPF**	(27) 28.01.95
21	Marvin **PLATTENHARDT**	(30) 26.01.92
31	Marton **DARDAI**	(20) 12.02.02
42	Julian **EITSCHBERGER**	(18) 05.03.04

MIDFIELDERS

6	Tolga **CIGERCI** (Tur)	(30) 23.03.92
8	Suat **SERDAR**	(25) 11.04.97
10	Jean-Paul **BOETIUS** (Ned)	(28) 22.03.94
27	Kevin-Prince **BOATENG** (Gha)	(35) 06.03.87
29	Lucas **TOUSART** (Fra)	(25) 29.04.97
34	Ivan **SUNJIC** (Cro)	(26) 09.10.96

FORWARDS

7	Florian **NIEDERLECHNER**	(32) 24.10.90
14	Dodi **LUKEBAKIO** (Bel)	(25) 24.09.97
18	Wilfried **KANGA** (Civ)	(24) 21.02.98
19	Stefan **JOVETIC** (Mne)	(33) 02.11.89
23	Marco **RICHTER**	(25) 24.11.97
24	Jessic **NGANKAM**	(22) 20.07.00
28	Kelian **NSONA** (Fra)	(20) 11.05.02
39	Derry **SCHERHANT**	(20) 10.11.02
40	Chidera **EJUKE** (Nga)	(25) 02.01.98

COACH

Sandro **SCHWARZ**	(44) 17.10.78

HOFFENHEIM

GOALKEEPERS

1	Oliver **BAUMANN**	(32) 02.06.90
12	Philipp **PENTKE**	(37) 01.05.85
36	Nahuel **NOLL**	(19) 17.03.03
37	Luca **PHILIPP**	(22) 28.11.00

DEFENDERS

3	Pavel **KADERABEK** (Cze)	(30) 25.04.92
4	Ermin **BICAKCIC** (Bih)	(32) 24.01.90
5	Ozan **KABAK** (Tur)	(22) 25.03.00
11	**ANGELINO** (Spa)	(26) 04.01.97
22	Kevin **VOGT**	(31) 23.09.91
23	John **BROOKS** (USA)	(30) 28.01.93
24	Justin **CHE** (USA)	(19) 18.11.03
25	Kevin **AKPOGUMA** (Nga)	(27) 19.04.95
26	Eduardo **QUARESMA** (Por)	(20) 02.03.02
34	Stanley **NSOKI** (Fra)	(23) 09.04.99

MIDFIELDERS

6	Grischa **PROMEL**	(28) 09.01.95
8	Dennis **GEIGER**	(24) 10.06.98
13	Angelo **STILLER**	(21) 04.04.01
14	Christoph **BAUMGARTNER** (Aut)	(23) 01.08.99
16	Sebastian **RUDY**	(32) 28.02.90
17	Thomas **DELANEY** (Den)	(31) 03.09.91
20	Finn Ole **BECKER**	(20) 08.06.00
35	Muhammed **DAMAR**	(18) 09.04.04
39	Tom **BISCHOF**	(17) 28.06.05
40	Umut **TOHUMCU**	(18) 11.08.04

FORWARDS

7	Jacob **BRUUN LARSEN** (Den)	(24) 19.09.98
9	Ihlas **BEBOU** (Tgo)	(28) 23.04.94
10	Munas **DABBUR** (Isr)	(30) 14.05.92
19	Kasper **DOLBERG** (Den)	(25) 06.10.97
27	Andrej **KRAMARIC** (Cro)	(31) 19.06.91
29	Robert **SKOV** (Den)	(26) 20.05.96
44	Fisnik **ASLLANI**	(20) 08.08.02

COACH

Andre **BREITENREITER**	(49) 02.10.73

MAINZ

GOALKEEPERS

1	Finn **DAHMEN**	(24) 27.03.98
27	Robin **ZENTNER**	(28) 28.10.94
32	Lasse **RIESS**	(21) 27.07.01

DEFENDERS

3	Aaron **MARTIN** (Spa)	(25) 22.04.97
5	Maxim **LEITSCH**	(24) 18.05.98
16	Stefan **BELL**	(31) 24.08.91
19	Anthony **CACI** (Fra)	(25) 01.07.97
21	Danny **DA COSTA**	(29) 13.07.93
25	Andreas **HANCHE-OLSEN** (Den)	(26) 17.01.97
30	Silvan **WIDMER** (Sui)	(29) 05.03.93
42	Alexander **HACK**	(29) 08.09.93

MIDFIELDERS

4	Aymen **BARKOK** (Mar)	(24) 21.05.98
6	Anton **STACH**	(24) 15.11.98
7	**LEE** Jae-sung (Kor)	(30) 10.08.92
8	Leandro **BARREIRO** (Lux)	(23) 03.01.00
20	Edimilson **FERNANDES** (Sui)	(26) 15.04.96
31	Dominik **KOHR**	(28) 31.01.94
35	Kaito **MIZUTA** (Jpn)	(22) 08.04.00
41	Eniss **SHABANI**	(19) 29.05.03

FORWARDS

9	Karim **ONISIWO** (Aut)	(30) 17.03.92
11	Marcus **INGVARTSEN** (Den)	(27) 04.01.96
17	Ludovic **AJORQUE** (Fra)	(28) 25.02.94
29	Jonathan **BURKARDT**	(22) 11.07.00
36	Marlon **MUSTAPHA** (Aut)	(21) 24.05.01
37	Delano **BURGZORG** (Ned)	(24) 07.11.98
43	Brajan **GRUDA**	(18) 31.05.04
44	Nelson **WEIPER**	(17) 17.03.05

COACH

Bo **SVENSSON** (Den)	(43) 04.08.79

RB LEIPZIG

GOALKEEPERS

1	Peter **GULACSI** (Hun)	(32) 06.05.90
13	Orjan **NYLAND** (Nor)	(32) 10.09.90
21	Janis **BLASWICH**	(31) 02.05.91

DEFENDERS

2	Mohamed **SIMAKAN** (Fra)	(22) 03.05.00
4	Willi **ORBAN** (Hun)	(30) 03.11.92
16	Lukas **KLOSTERMANN**	(26) 03.06.96
22	David **RAUM**	(24) 22.04.98
23	Marcus **HALSTENBERG**	(31) 27.09.91
25	Sanoussy **BA**	(19) 05.01.04
32	Josko **GVARDIOL** (Cro)	(21) 23.01.02
37	Abdou **DIALLO** (Sen)	(26) 04.05.96
39	Benjamin **HENRICHS**	(25) 23.02.97

MIDFIELDERS

8	Amadou **HAIDARA** (Mli)	(25) 31.01.98
10	Emil **FORSBERG** (Swe)	(31) 23.10.91
17	Dominik **SZOBOSZLAI** (Hun)	(22) 25.10.00
24	Xaver **SCHLAGER** (Aut)	(25) 28.09.97
27	Konrad **LAIMER** (Aut)	(25) 27.05.97
28	Caden **CLARK** (USA)	(19) 27.05.03
44	Kevin **KAMPL** (Svn)	(32) 09.10.90

FORWARDS

7	Dani **OLMO** (Spa)	(24) 07.05.98
9	Yussuf **POULSEN** (Den)	(28) 15.06.94
11	Timo **WERNER**	(26) 06.03.96
18	Christopher **NKUNKU** (Fra)	(25) 14.11.97
19	Andre **SILVA** (Por)	(27) 06.11.95

COACH

Marco **ROSE**	(46) 11.09.76

SCHALKE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Ralf **FAHRMANN**	(34) 27.09.88
13	Alexander **SCHWOLOW**	(30) 02.06.92
28	Justin **HEEKEREN**	(22) 27.11.00
34	Michael **LANGER** (Aut)	(38) 06.01.85

DEFENDERS

2	Thomas **OUWEJAN** (Ned)	(26) 30.09.96
3	Leo **GREIML** (Aut)	(21) 03.07.01
4	Maya **YOSHIDA** (Jpn)	(34) 24.08.88
5	Sepp **VAN DEN BERG** (Ned)	(21) 20.12.01
15	Timothee **KOLODZIEJCZAK** (Fra)	(31) 01.10.91
18	Jere **URONEN** (Fin)	(28) 13.07.94
22	Ibrahima **CISSE** (Fra)	(21) 15.02.01
25	Moritz **JENS**	(23) 30.04.99
27	Cedric **BRUNNER** (Sui)	(28) 17.02.94
35	Marcin **KAMINSKI** (Pol)	(31) 15.01.92
41	Henning **MATRICIANI**	(22) 14.03.00

MIDFIELDERS

6	Tom **KRAUSS**	(21) 22.06.01
8	Danny **LATZA**	(33) 07.12.89
10	Rodrigo **ZALAZAR** (Uru)	(23) 12.08.99
21	Niklas **TAUER**	(21) 17.02.01
23	Mehmet Can **AYDIN**	(20) 09.02.02
24	Dominick **DREXLER**	(32) 26.05.90
29	Tobias **MOHR**	(27) 24.08.95
30	Alex **KRAL** (Cze)	(24) 19.05.98
33	Eder **BALANTA** (Col)	(29) 28.02.93

FORWARDS

9	Simon **TERODDE**	(34) 02.03.88
11	Marius **BULTER**	(29) 29.03.93
19	Kenan **KARAMAN** (Tur)	(28) 05.03.94
20	Tim **SKARKE**	(26) 07.09.96
26	Michael **FREY** (Sui)	(28) 19.07.94
38	Soichiro **KOZUKI** (Jpn)	(22) 22.12.00
40	Sebastian **POLTER**	(31) 01.04.91

COACH

Thomas **REIS**	(49) 04.10.73

STUTTGART

GOALKEEPERS

1	Florian **MULLER**	(25) 13.11.97
33	Fabian **BREDLOW**	(27) 02.03.95
42	Florian **SCHOCK**	(21) 22.05.01

DEFENDERS

2	Waldemar **ANTON** (Uzb)	(26) 20.07.96
4	Josha **VAGNOMAN**	(22) 11.12.00
5	Konstantinos **MAVROPANOS** (Gre)	(25) 11.12.97
15	Pascal **STENZEL**	(26) 20.03.96
21	Hiroki **ITO** (Jpn)	(23) 12.05.99
23	Dan-Axel **ZAGADOU** (Fra)	(23) 03.06.99
24	Borna **SOSA** (Cro)	(24) 21.01.98
37	Antonis **AIDONIS**	(21) 22.05.01

MIDFIELDERS

3	Wataru **ENDO** (Jpn)	(29) 09.02.93
7	Tanguy **COULIBALY** (Fra)	(21) 18.02.01
8	Enzo **MILLOT** (Fra)	(20) 17.07.02
16	Atakan **KARAZOR**	(26) 13.10.96
17	Genki **HARAGUCHI** (Jpn)	(31) 09.05.91
22	Chris **FUHRICH**	(24) 09.01.98
25	Lilian **EGLOFF**	(20) 20.08.02
28	Nikolas **NARTEY** (Den)	(22) 22.02.00
34	Omer **BEYAZ**	(19) 29.08.03
36	Laurin **ULRICH**	(17) 31.01.05

FORWARDS

9	Serhou **GUIRASSY** (Gui)	(26) 12.03.96
10	Tiago **TOMAS** (Por)	(20) 16.06.02
11	Juan Jose **PEREA** (Col)	(22) 23.02.00
14	Silas **KATOMPA MVUMPA** (Cod)	(24) 06.10.98
20	Luca **PFEIFFER**	(26) 20.08.96
27	Alou **KUOL** (Aus)	(21) 05.07.01
31	Gil **DIAS** (Por)	(26) 28.09.96
39	Thomas **KASTANARAS** (Gre)	(20) 09.01.03

COACH

Bruno **LABBADIA**	(56) 08.02.66

UNION BERLIN

GOALKEEPERS

1	Frederik **RONNOW** (Den)	(30) 04.08.92
12	Jakob **BUSK** (Den)	(29) 12.09.93
37	Lennart **GRILL**	(23) 25.01.99

DEFENDERS

3	Paul **JAECKEL**	(24) 22.07.98
4	Diogo **LEITE** (Por)	(23) 23.01.99
5	Danilho **DOEKHI** (Ned)	(24) 30.06.98
18	Josip **JURANOVIC** (Cro)	(27) 16.08.95
23	Niko **GIESSELMANN**	(31) 26.09.91
25	Timo **BAUMGARTL**	(26) 04.03.96
26	Jerome **ROUSSILLON** (Fra)	(30) 06.01.93
28	Christopher **TRIMMEL** (Aut)	(35) 24.02.87
31	Robin **KNOCHE**	(30) 22.05.92

MIDFIELDERS

2	Morten **THORSBY** (Nor)	(26) 05.05.96
7	Levin **OZTUNALI**	(26) 15.03.96
8	Rani **KHEDIRA**	(28) 27.01.94
13	Andras **SCHAFER** (Hun)	(23) 13.04.99
14	Paul **SEGUIN**	(27) 29.03.95
19	Janik **HABERER**	(28) 02.04.94
20	Aissa **LAIDOUNI** (Tun)	(26) 13.12.96
30	Kevin **MOHWALD**	(29) 03.07.93

FORWARDS

11	Sven **MICHEL**	(32) 15.07.90
16	Tim **MACIEJEWSKI**	(21) 05.03.01
17	Kevin **BEHRENS**	(31) 03.02.91
27	Sheraldo **BECKER** (Sur)	(27) 09.02.95
32	Milos **PANTOVIC** (Srb)	(26) 07.07.96
40	Jamie **LEWELING**	(21) 26.02.01
45	Jordan **PEFOK** (USA)	(26) 26.04.96

COACH

Urs **FISCHER** (Sui)	(56) 20.02.66

WERDER BREMEN

GOALKEEPERS

1	Jiri **PAVLENKA** (Cze)	(30) 14.04.92
30	Michael **ZETTERER**	(27) 12.07.95
37	Mio **BACKHAUS**	(18) 16.04.04
38	**DUDU**	(23) 10.02.99
40	Louis **LORD**	(19) 22.10.03

DEFENDERS

3	Anthony **JUNG**	(31) 03.11.91
4	Niklas **STARK**	(27) 14.04.95
5	Amos **PIEPER**	(25) 17.01.98
8	Mitchell **WEISER**	(28) 21.04.94
13	Milos **VELJKOVIC** (Srb)	(27) 26.09.95
26	Lee **BUCHANAN** (Eng)	(21) 07.03.01
27	Felix **AGU**	(23) 27.09.99
32	Marco **FRIEDL** (Aut)	(24) 16.03.98
36	Christian **GROSS**	(33) 08.02.89
39	Fabio **CHIARODIA** (Ita)	(17) 05.06.05

MIDFIELDERS

6	Jens **STAGE** (Den)	(26) 08.11.96
10	Leonardo **BITTENCOURT**	(29) 19.12.93
19	Dikeni **SALIFOU** (Tgo)	(19) 08.06.03
20	Romano **SCHMID** (Aut)	(22) 27.01.00
22	Niklas **SCHMIDT**	(24) 01.03.98
28	Ilia **GRUEV** (Bul)	(22) 06.05.00
34	Jean-Manuel **MBOM**	(22) 24.02.00

FORWARDS

7	Marvin **DUCKSCH**	(28) 07.03.94
11	Niclas **FULLKRUG**	(29) 09.02.93
17	Maximilian **PHILIPP**	(28) 01.03.94
21	Eren **DINKCI**	(21) 13.12.01

COACH

Ole **WERNER**	(34) 04.05.88

WOLFSBURG

GOALKEEPERS

1	Koen **CASTEELS** (Bel)	(30) 25.06.92
12	Pavao **PERVAN** (Aut)	(35) 13.11.87
30	Niklas **KLINGER**	(27) 13.10.95
35	Philipp **SCHULZE**	(19) 29.01.03

DEFENDERS

2	Kilian **FISCHER**	(22) 12.10.00
3	Sebastiaan **BORNAUW** (Bel)	(23) 22.03.99
4	Maxence **LACROIX** (Fra)	(22) 06.04.00
5	Micky **VAN DE VEN** (Ned)	(21) 19.04.01
6	Paulo **OTAVIO** (Bra)	(28) 23.11.94
8	Nicolas **COZZA** (Fra)	(24) 08.01.99
20	Ridle **BAKU**	(24) 08.04.98

MIDFIELDERS

16	Jakub **KAMINSKI** (Pol)	(20) 05.06.02
22	Felix **NMECHA**	(22) 10.10.00
27	Maximilian **ARNOLD**	(28) 27.05.94
29	Josuha **GUILAVOGUI** (Fra)	(32) 19.09.90
31	Yannick **GERHARDT**	(28) 13.03.94
32	Mattias **SVANBERG** (Swe)	(24) 05.01.99
38	Bartol **FRANJIC** (Cro)	(23) 14.01.00
39	Patrick **WIMMER** (Aut)	(21) 30.05.01
40	Kevin **PAREDES** (USA)	(19) 07.05.03

FORWARDS

7	Luca **WALDSCHMIDT**	(26) 19.05.96
10	Lukas **NMECHA**	(24) 14.12.98
18	Dzenan **PEJCINOVIC**	(17) 15.02.05
23	Jonas **WIND** (Den)	(23) 07.02.99
33	Omar **MARMOUSH** (Egy)	(23) 07.02.99

COACH

Niko **KOVAC** (Cro)	(51) 15.10.71

Influential midfielder...Wolfsburg captain Maximilian Arnold

(Ages as of 17.02.23)

FRANCE: LIGUE 1 2022-23

AJACCIO

GOALKEEPERS

1	Benjamin **LEROY**	(33) 07.04.89
16	Francois-Joseph **SOLLACARO**	(28) 21.03.94
30	Ghjuvanni **QUILICHINI**	(20) 01.09.02

DEFENDERS

2	Mickael **ALPHONSE** (Glp)	(33) 12.07.89
3	Ismael **DIALLO** (Civ)	(25) 29.01.97
15	Clement **VIDAL**	(22) 18.06.00
21	Cedric **AVINEL** (Glp)	(36) 11.09.86
25	Oumar **GONZALEZ** (Cmr)	(24) 25.02.98
44	Chaker **ALHADHUR** (Com)	(31) 04.12.91
77	Fernand **MAYEMBO** (Cgo)	(27) 09.01.96
99	Youssouf **KONE** (Mli)	(27) 05.07.95

MIDFIELDERS

4	Michael **BARRETO**	(32) 18.01.91
5	Riad **NOURI**	(37) 07.06.85
6	Mathieu **COUTADEUR**	(36) 20.03.86
8	Vincent **MARCHETTI**	(25) 04.07.97
19	Alassane **N'DIAYE**	(31) 14.06.91
20	Mohamed **YOUSSOUF** (Com)	(34) 26.03.88
22	Yanis **CIMIGNANI**	(21) 22.01.02
23	Thomas **MANGANI**	(35) 29.04.87
27	Kevin **SPADANUDA** (Sui)	(26) 16.01.97

FORWARDS

7	Mounaim **EL IDRISSY**	(24) 10.02.99
9	Yoann **TOUZGHAR** (Tun)	(36) 29.11.86
11	Bevic **MOUSSITI-OKO** (Cgo)	(28) 28.01.95
14	Cyrille **BAYALA** (Bfa)	(26) 24.05.96
17	Romain **HAMOUMA**	(35) 29.03.87
18	Jean **BOTUE** (Bfa)	(21) 07.01.02
28	Moussa **DJITTE** (Sen)	(23) 04.10.99
29	Florian **CHABROLLE**	(24) 07.04.98
92	Youcef **BELAILI** (Alg)	(30) 14.03.92

COACH

	Olivier **PANTALONI**	(56) 13.12.66

ANGERS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Paul **BERNARDONI**	(25) 18.04.97
16	Melvin **ZINGA**	(20) 16.03.02
30	Yahia **FOFANA**	(22) 21.08.00
40	Theo **BORNE**	(20) 15.07.02

DEFENDERS

3	Souleyman **DOUMBIA** (Civ)	(26) 24.09.96
4	Halid **SABANOVIC** (Bih)	(23) 22.08.99
5	Miha **BLAZIC** (Svn)	(29) 08.05.93
8	Faouzi **GHOULAM** (Alg)	(32) 01.01.91
22	Cedric **HOUNTONDJI** (Ben)	(29) 19.01.94
25	Abdoulaye **BAMBA** (Civ)	(32) 25.04.90
29	Ousmane **CAMARA**	(19) 06.03.03
31	Ilyes **CHETTI** (Alg)	(28) 22.01.95
27	Ali **KALLA**	(24) 23.04.98
94	Yan **VALERY** (Tun)	(23) 22.02.99

MIDFIELDERS

2	Batista **MENDY**	(23) 12.01.00
6	Nabil **BENTALEB** (Alg)	(28) 24.11.94
10	Himad **ABDELLI**	(23) 17.11.99
14	Yassin **BELKHDIM**	(21) 14.02.02
15	Pierrick **CAPELLE**	(35) 15.04.87
17	Ibrahim **AMADOU**	(29) 06.04.93
26	Waniss **TAIBI**	(20) 07.03.02

FORWARDS

9	Lois **DIONY**	(30) 20.12.92
11	Amine **SALAMA**	(22) 18.07.00
19	Abdallah **SIMA** (Sen)	(21) 17.06.01
20	Ulrick **ENEME-ELLA** (Gab)	(21) 22.05.01
23	Adrien **HUNOU**	(29) 19.01.94
24	Jean-Matteo **BAHOYA**	(17) 07.05.05
92	Sada **THIOUB** (Sen)	(27) 01.06.95

COACH

	Abdel **BOUHAZAMA**	(54) 04.01.69

AUXERRE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Ionut **RADU** (Rou)	(25) 28.05.97
16	Donovan **LEON** (Guf)	(30) 03.11.92
37	Vincenzo **COZZELLA** (Ita)	(21) 21.12.01
40	Theo **DE PERCIN**	(22) 02.02.01

DEFENDERS

2	Brayann **PEREIRA**	(19) 21.05.03
4	**JUBAL** (Bra)	(29) 29.08.93
5	Theo **PELLENARD**	(28) 04.03.94
13	Akim **ZEDADKA** (Alg)	(27) 30.05.95
14	Gideon **MENSAH** (Gha)	(24) 18.07.98
24	Kenji-Van **BOTO** (Mad)	(26) 07.03.96
27	Julian **JEANVIER** (Gui)	(30) 31.03.92
32	Denys **BAIN**	(29) 02.07.93
95	Isaak **TOURE**	(19) 28.03.03

MIDFIELDERS

6	Youssouf **M'CHANGAMA** (Com)	(32) 29.08.90
8	Ousoumane **CAMARA**	(24) 19.12.98
12	Birama **TOURE** (Mli)	(30) 06.06.92
18	Kays **RUIZ-ATIL**	(20) 26.08.02
22	Hamza **SAKHI** (Mar)	(26) 07.06.96
29	Mathias **AUTRET**	(31) 01.03.91
31	Kylian **SILVESTRE**	(20) 16.08.02
34	Natanael **BOUEKOU**	(20) 10.05.02
35	Kevin **DANOIS**	(18) 28.06.04
42	Elisha **OWUSU** (Gha)	(25) 07.11.97
80	Han-Noah **MASSENGO**	(21) 07.07.01
97	Rayan **RAVELOSON** (Mad)	(26) 16.01.97

FORWARDS

7	Gauthier **HEIN**	(26) 07.08.96
9	Nuno **DA COSTA** (Cpv)	(32) 10.02.91
10	Gaetan **PERRIN**	(26) 07.06.96
11	Mbaye **NIANG** (Sen)	(28) 19.12.94
17	Lassine **SINAYOKO** (Mli)	(23) 08.12.99
19	Matthis **ABLINE**	(19) 28.03.03
21	Remy **DUGIMONT**	(36) 01.07.86
28	Ousmane **CAMARA** (Gui)	(21) 03.11.01
36	Idjessi **METSOKO**	(20) 14.03.02
77	Siriki **DEMBELE** (Sco)	(26) 07.09.96

COACH

	Christophe **PELISSIER**	(57) 05.10.65

BREST

GOALKEEPERS

1	Joaquin **BLAZQUEZ** (Arg)	(22) 28.01.01
30	Gregoire **COUDERT**	(23) 03.04.99
40	Marco **BIZOT** (Ned)	(31) 10.03.91

DEFENDERS

2	Jean-Kevin **DUVERNE**	(25) 12.07.97
3	Lilian **BRASSIER**	(24) 11.02.99
4	Achraf **DARI** (Mar)	(23) 06.05.99
5	Brendan **CHARDONNET**	(28) 22.12.94
23	Christophe **HERELLE**	(30) 22.08.92
27	Kenny **LALA**	(31) 03.10.91
28	Bradley **LOCKO**	(20) 06.05.02
99	Noah **FADIGA** (Sen)	(23) 03.12.99
	Josue **ESCARTIN**	(19) 21.03.03

MIDFIELDERS

7	Haris **BELKEBLA** (Alg)	(29) 28.01.94
8	Hugo **MAGNETTI**	(24) 30.05.98
9	Franck **HONORAT**	(26) 11.08.96
10	Romain **DEL CASTILLO**	(26) 29.03.96
20	Pierre **LEES-MELOU**	(29) 25.05.93
29	Mathias **PEREIRA LAGE** (Por)	(26) 30.11.96
37	Felix **LEMARECHAL**	(19) 07.08.03
45	Mahdi **CAMARA**	(24) 30.06.98

FORWARDS

15	Steve **MOUNIE** (Ben)	(28) 29.09.94
17	Alberth **ELIS** (Hon)	(27) 12.02.96
18	Karamoko **DEMBELE** (Eng)	(19) 22.02.03
22	Jeremy **LE DOUARON**	(24) 21.04.98
97	Tairyk **ARCONTE**	(19) 12.11.03
	Loic **REMY**	(36) 02.11.87

COACH

	Eric **ROY**	(55) 26.09.67

CLERMONT

GOALKEEPERS

16	Lucas **MARGUERON**	(22) 12.02.01
40	Ouparine **DJOCO**	(24) 22.04.98
99	Mory **DIAW**	(29) 22.06.93

DEFENDERS

2	Mehdi **ZEFFANE** (Alg)	(30) 19.05.92
3	Neto **BORGES** (Bra)	(26) 13.09.96
4	Mateusz **WIETESKA** (Pol)	(26) 11.02.97
5	Maximiliano **CAUFRIEZ** (Bel)	(26) 16.02.97
13	Souleymane **CISSE** (Sen)	(24) 01.01.99
17	Oliver **KAMDEM**	(20) 15.10.02
21	Florent **OGIER**	(33) 21.03.89
31	Baila **DIALLO** (Sen)	(21) 24.06.01
36	Alidu **SEIDU** (Gha)	(22) 04.06.00

MIDFIELDERS

7	Yohann **MAGNIN**	(25) 21.06.97
10	Saif-Eddine **KHAOUI** (Tun)	(27) 27.04.95
12	Maxime **GONALONS**	(33) 10.03.89
25	Johan **GASTIEN**	(35) 25.01.88
70	Muhammed **CHAM** (Aut)	(22) 26.09.00
97	Yanis **MASSOLIN**	(20) 20.09.02

FORWARDS

9	Komnen **ANDRIC** (Srb)	(27) 01.07.95
11	Jim **ALLEVINAH** (Gab)	(27) 27.02.95
18	Elbasan **RASHANI** (Kxv)	(29) 09.05.93
91	Jeremie **BELA** (Ang)	(29) 08.04.93
95	Grejohn **KYEI**	(27) 12.08.95

COACH

	Pascal **GASTIEN**	(59) 02.12.63

LENS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Wuilker **FARINEZ** (Ven)	(29) 02.09.93
16	Jean-Louis **LECA**	(37) 21.09.85
30	Brice **SAMBA** (Cgo)	(28) 25.04.94
40	Yannick **PANDOR**	(21) 01.05.01

DEFENDERS

3	Deiver **MACHADO** (Col)	(29) 02.09.93
4	Kevin **DANSO** (Aut)	(24) 19.09.98
14	Facundo **MEDINA** (Arg)	(23) 28.05.99
15	Steven **FORTES** (Cpv)	(30) 17.04.92
19	Jimmy **CABOT**	(28) 18.04.94
21	Massadio **HAIDARA** (Sen)	(30) 02.12.92
23	Ismael **BOURA**	(22) 14.08.00
24	Jonathan **GRADIT**	(30) 24.11.92
25	Julien **LE CARDINAL**	(25) 03.08.97
33	Yacouba **BARRY**	(20) 25.11.02
35	Adrien **LOUVEAU**	(23) 01.02.00

MIDFIELDERS

6	Jean **ONANA** (Cmr)	(23) 08.01.00
8	Seko **FOFANA** (Civ)	(27) 07.05.95
10	David **COSTA** (Por)	(22) 05.01.01
13	Lukasz **POREBA** (Pol)	(22) 13.03.00
20	Angelo **FULGINI**	(26) 20.08.96
26	Salis **ABDUL-SAMED** (Gha)	(22) 26.03.00
28	Adrien **THOMASSON**	(29) 10.12.93
29	Przemyslaw **FRANKOWSKI** (Pol)	(27) 12.04.95
34	Yaya **FOFANA** (Mli)	(18) 12.06.04
36	Mamadou **CAMARA** (Sen)	(20) 15.10.02

FORWARDS

7	Florian **SOTOCA**	(32) 25.10.90
9	Adam **BUKSA** (Pol)	(26) 12.07.96
11	Lois **OPENDA** (Bel)	(23) 16.02.00
18	Alexis **CLAUDE-MAURICE**	(24) 06.06.98
22	Wesley **SAID**	(27) 19.04.95

COACH

	Franck **HAISE**	(51) 15.04.71

LILLE

GOALKEEPERS

16	Adam **JAKUBECH** (Svk)	(26) 02.01.97
25	Benoit **COSTIL**	(35) 03.07.87
30	Lucas **CHEVALIER**	(21) 06.11.01

DEFENDERS

3	Tiago **DJALO** (Por)	(22) 09.04.00
4	**ALEXSANDRO** (Bra)	(23) 09.08.99
5	Gabriel **GUDMUNDSSON** (Swe)	(23) 29.04.99
6	Jose **FONTE** (Por)	(39) 22.12.83
15	Leny **YORO**	(17) 13.11.05
18	Bafode **DIAKITE**	(22) 06.01.01
31	**ISMAILY** (Bra)	(33) 11.01.90

MIDFIELDERS

8	Jonas **MARTIN**	(32) 09.04.90
10	Remy **CABELLA**	(32) 08.03.90
11	Adam **OUNAS** (Alg)	(26) 11.11.96
20	Angel **GOMES** (Eng)	(22) 31.08.00
21	Benjamin **ANDRE**	(32) 03.08.90
23	Edon **ZHEGROVA** (Kxv)	(23) 31.03.99
28	Andre **GOMES** (Por)	(29) 30.07.93
35	Carlos **BALEBA** (Cmr)	(19) 03.01.04

FORWARDS

7	Jonathan **BAMBA**	(26) 26.03.96
9	Jonathan **DAVID** (Can)	(23) 14.01.00
22	Timothy **WEAH** (USA)	(22) 22.02.00
26	Alan **VIRGINIUS**	(20) 03.01.03
27	Mohamed **BAYO** (Gui)	(24) 04.06.98

COACH

	Paulo **FONSECA** (Por)	(49) 05.03.73

LORIENT

GOALKEEPERS

1	Vito **MANNONE** (Ita)	(34) 02.03.88
23	Julian **POLLERSBECK** (Ger)	(28) 16.08.94
38	Yvon **MVOGO** (Sui)	(28) 06.06.94
40	Eddy **EHLINGER**	(21) 14.11.01
77	Teddy **BARTOUCHE-SELBONNE**	(25) 05.06.97

DEFENDERS

2	Igor **SILVA** (Bra)	(26) 21.08.96
3	Montassar **TALBI** (Tun)	(24) 06.05.98
12	Darlin **YONGWA** (Cmr)	(22) 22.09.00
15	Julien **LAPORTE**	(29) 04.11.93
18	Bamo **MEITE**	(21) 03.12.01
24	Gedeon **KALULU** (Cod)	(25) 29.08.97
25	Vincent **LE GOFF**	(33) 15.10.89
34	Maxime **WACKERS**	(25) 01.01.98

MIDFIELDERS

6	Laurent **ABERGEL**	(29) 01.02.93
8	Bonke **INNOCENT**	(27) 20.01.96
10	Enzo **LE FEE**	(22) 03.02.00
14	Romain **FAIVRE**	(24) 14.07.98
17	Jean-Victor **MAKENGO**	(24) 12.06.98
21	Julien **PONCEAU**	(22) 28.11.00
37	Theo **LE BRIS**	(20) 01.10.02
44	Ayman **KARI**	(18) 19.11.04
70	Adil **AOUCHICHE**	(20) 15.07.02

FORWARDS

7	Stephane **DIARRA** (Civ)	(24) 09.12.98
9	Ibrahima **KONE** (Mli)	(23) 16.06.99
11	Bamba **DIENG** (Sen)	(22) 23.03.20
22	Yoann **CATHLINE**	(20) 22.07.02
29	Sirine **DOUCOURE**	(20) 08.04.02

COACH

	Regis **LE BRIS**	(47) 06.12.75

LYON

GOALKEEPERS

1	Anthony **LOPES** (Por)	(32) 01.10.90
35	Remy **RIOU**	(35) 06.08.87
40	Kayne **BONNEVIE**	(21) 22.07.01

DEFENDERS

2	Sinaly **DIOMANDE** (Civ)	(21) 09.04.01
3	Nicolas **TAGLIAFICO** (Arg)	(30) 31.08.92
4	Castello **LUKEBA**	(20) 17.12.02
5	Dejan **LOVREN** (Cro)	(33) 05.07.89
12	**HENRIQUE** (Bra)	(28) 26.04.94
17	Jerome **BOATENG** (Ger)	(34) 03.09.88
20	Sael **KUMBEDI**	(17) 26.03.05
27	Malo **GUSTO**	(19) 19.05.03

MIDFIELDERS

6	Maxence **CAQUERET**	(23) 15.02.00
8	Houssem **AOUAR**	(24) 30.06.98
23	Thiago **MENDES** (Bra)	(30) 15.03.92
24	Johann **LEPENANT**	(20) 22.10.02
88	Corentin **TOLISSO**	(28) 03.08.94

FORWARDS

7	Amin **SARR** (Swe)	(21) 11.03.01
9	Moussa **DEMBELE**	(26) 12.07.96
10	Alexandre **LACAZETTE**	(31) 28.05.91
18	Rayan **CHERKI**	(19) 17.08.03
26	Bradley **BARCOLA**	(20) 02.09.02
47	**JEFFINHO** (Bra)	(23) 30.12.99

COACH

	Laurent **BLANC**	(57) 19.11.65

MARSEILLE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Simon **NGAPANDOUETNBU** (Cmr)	(19) 12.04.03
16	Pau **LOPEZ** (Spa)	(28) 13.12.94
36	Ruben **BLANCO** (Spa)	(27) 25.07.95

DEFENDERS

3	Eric **BAILLY** (Civ)	(28) 12.04.94
4	Samuel **GIGOT**	(29) 12.10.93
5	Leonardo **BALERDI** (Arg)	(24) 26.01.99
7	Jonathan **CLAUSS**	(30) 25.09.92
23	Sead **KOLASINAC** (Bih)	(29) 20.06.93
29	Issa **KABORE** (Bfa)	(21) 12.05.01
30	Nuno **TAVARES** (Por)	(23) 26.01.00
99	Chancel **MBEMBA** (Cod)	(28) 08.08.94

MIDFIELDERS

6	Matteo **GUENDOUZI**	(23) 14.04.99
8	Azzeddine **OUNAHI** (Mar)	(22) 19.04.00
10	Dimitri **PAYET**	(35) 29.03.87
18	Ruslan **MALINOVSKYI** (Ukr)	(29) 04.05.93
21	Valentin **RONGIER**	(28) 07.12.94
27	Jordan **VERETOUT**	(29) 01.03.93
47	Bartug **ELMAZ** (Tur)	(19) 19.02.03
77	Amine **HARIT** (Mar)	(25) 18.06.97

FORWARDS

9	**VITINHA** (Por)	(22) 15.03.00
17	Cengiz **UNDER** (Tur)	(25) 14.07.97
70	Alexis **SANCHEZ** (Chi)	(34) 19.12.88

COACH

	Igor **TUDOR** (Cro)	(44) 16.04.78

MONACO

GOALKEEPERS

16	Alexander **NUBEL** (Ger)	(26) 30.09.96
30	Thomas **DIDILLON**	(27) 28.11.95
50	Yann **LIENARD**	(19) 16.03.03

DEFENDERS

2	**VANDERSON** (Bra)	(21) 21.06.01
3	Guillermo **MARIPAN** (Chi)	(28) 06.05.94
6	Axel **DISASI**	(24) 11.03.98
12	**CAIO HENRIQUE** (Bra)	(25) 31.07.97
14	Ismail **JAKOBS** (Sen)	(23) 17.08.99
23	Malang **SARR**	(24) 23.01.99
26	Ruben **AGUILAR**	(29) 26.04.93
34	Chrislain **MATSIMA**	(20) 15.05.02
99	Yllan **OKOU**	(20) 23.12.02

MIDFIELDERS

4	Mohamed **CAMARA** (Mli)	(23) 06.01.00
11	Jean **LUCAS** (Bra)	(24) 22.06.98
15	Eliot **MATAZO** (Bel)	(21) 15.02.02
17	Aleksandr **GOLOVIN** (Rus)	(26) 30.05.96
18	Takumi **MINAMINO** (Jpn)	(28) 16.01.95
19	Youssouf **FOFANA**	(24) 10.01.99
21	Maghnes **AKLIOUCHE**	(20) 25.02.02
27	Krepin **DIATTA** (Sen)	(23) 25.02.99
41	Soungoutou **MAGASSA**	(19) 08.10.03
44	Eliesse **BEN SEGHIR**	(18) 16.02.05
77	Gelson **MARTINS** (Por)	(27) 11.05.95

FORWARDS

9	Myron **BOADU** (Ned)	(22) 14.01.01
10	Wissam **BEN YEDDER**	(32) 12.08.90
31	Kevin **VOLLAND** (Ger)	(30) 30.07.92
36	Breel **EMBOLO** (Sui)	(26) 14.02.97

COACH

	Philippe **CLEMENT** (Bel)	(48) 22.03.74

MONTPELLIER

GOALKEEPERS

16	Dimitry **BERTAUD**	(24) 06.06.98
30	Matis **CARVALHO** (Por)	(23) 28.04.99
40	Benjamin **LECOMTE**	(31) 26.04.91
90	Bingourou **KAMARA** (Sen)	(26) 21.10.96

DEFENDERS

3	Issiaga **SYLLA** (Gui)	(29) 01.01.94
4	Kiki **KOUYATE** (Mli)	(25) 15.04.97
5	Pedro **MENDES** (Por)	(32) 01.10.90
6	Christopher **JULLIEN**	(29) 22.03.93
14	Maxime **ESTEVE**	(20) 26.05.02
15	Mathias **SUAREZ** (Uru)	(26) 24.06.96
17	Theo **SAINTE-LUCE**	(24) 20.10.98
26	Thibault **TAMAS**	(21) 20.02.01
27	Faitout **MAOUASSA**	(24) 06.07.98
29	Enzo **TCHATO** (Cmr)	(20) 23.11.02
75	Mamadou **SAKHO**	(32) 13.02.90
77	Falaye **SACKO** (Mli)	(27) 01.05.95

MIDFIELDERS

11	Teji **SAVANIER**	(31) 22.12.91
12	Jordan **FERRI**	(30) 12.03.92
13	Joris **CHOTARD**	(21) 24.09.01
18	Leo **LEROY**	(22) 14.02.00
22	Khalil **FAYAD**	(18) 09.06.04

FORWARDS

7	Arnaud **NORDIN**	(24) 17.06.98
9	Valere **GERMAIN**	(32) 17.04.90
10	Stephy **MAVIDIDI** (Eng)	(24) 31.05.98
20	Yanis **GUERMOUCHE** (Alg)	(21) 15.04.01
21	Elye **WAHI**	(20) 02.01.03
28	Beni **MAKOUANA** (Cgo)	(20) 28.09.02
99	Wahbi **KHAZRI** (Tun)	(31) 08.02.91

COACH

	Romain **PITAU**	(45) 08.08.77

NANTES

GOALKEEPERS

1	Alban **LAFONT**	(24) 23.01.99
16	Remy **DESCAMPS**	(26) 25.06.96
30	Denis **PETRIC** (Svn)	(34) 24.05.88

DEFENDERS

3	Andrei **GIROTTO** (Bra)	(31) 17.02.92
4	Nicolas **PALLOIS**	(35) 19.09.87
21	Jean-Charles **CASTELLETTO** (Cmr)	(28) 26.01.95
23	Robin **VOISINE**	(21) 07.04.02
24	Sebastien **CORCHIA**	(32) 01.11.90
26	Jaouen **HADJAM**	(19) 26.03.03
28	Fabien **CENTONZE**	(27) 16.01.96
38	**JOAO VICTOR** (Por)	(24) 17.07.98
93	Charles **TRAORE** (Mli)	(31) 01.01.92

MIDFIELDERS

5	Pedro **CHIRIVELLA** (Spa)	(25) 23.05.97
8	Samuel **MOUTOUSSAMY** (Cod)	(26) 12.08.96
10	Ludovic **BLAS**	(25) 31.12.97
17	Moussa **SISSOKO**	(33) 16.08.89
20	Lohann **DOUCET**	(20) 14.09.02
25	Florent **MOLLET** (Fra)	(31) 19.11.91
29	Quentin **MERLIN**	(20) 16.05.02

FORWARDS

7	Evann **GUESSAND**	(21) 01.07.01
11	Marcus **COCO**	(26) 24.06.96
14	Ignatius **GANAGO** (Cmr)	(24) 16.02.99
22	Gor **MANVELYAN**	(20) 09.04.02
27	Moses **SIMON** (Nga)	(27) 12.07.95
31	Mostafa **MOHAMED** (Egy)	(25) 28.11.97
99	Andy **DELORT** (Alg)	(31) 09.10.91

COACH

	Antoine **KOMBOUARE**	(59) 16.11.63

NICE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Kasper **SCHMEICHEL** (Den)	(36) 05.11.86
77	Teddy **BOULHENDI** (Alg)	(21) 09.04.01
90	Marcin **BULKA** (Pol)	(23) 04.10.99

DEFENDERS

4	**DANTE** (Bra)	(39) 18.10.83
15	Joe **BRYAN** (Eng)	(29) 17.09.93
20	Youcef **ATAL** (Alg)	(26) 17.05.96
23	Jordan **LOTOMBA** (Sui)	(24) 29.09.98
25	Jean-Clair **TODIBO**	(23) 30.12.99
26	Melvin **BARD**	(22) 06.11.00
33	Antoine **MENDY**	(18) 27.05.04
42	Mattia **VITI** (Ita)	(21) 24.01.02
55	Youssouf **NDAYISHIMIYE** (Bdi)	(24) 27.10.98

MIDFIELDERS

8	Pablo **ROSARIO** (Ned)	(26) 07.01.97
10	Sofiane **DIOP**	(22) 09.06.00
11	Ross **BARKLEY** (Eng)	(29) 05.12.93
16	Aaron **RAMSEY** (Wal)	(32) 26.12.90
19	Khephren **THURAM**	(21) 26.03.01
21	Alexis **BEKA BEKA**	(21) 29.03.01
28	Hicham **BOUDAOUI** (Alg)	(23) 23.09.99
35	Badredine **BOUANANI**	(18) 08.12.04
37	Reda **BELAHYANE**	(18) 01.06.04
39	Daouda **TRAORE**	(16) 22.07.06

FORWARDS

9	Terem **MOFFI** (Nga)	(23) 25.05.99
14	Billal **BRAHIMI** (Alg)	(22) 14.03.00
24	Gaetan **LABORDE**	(28) 03.05.94
29	Nicolas **PEPE** (Civ)	(27) 29.05.95

COACH

	Didier **DIGARD**	(36) 12.07.86

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN

GOALKEEPERS

16	Sergio **RICO** (Spa)	(29) 01.09.93
70	Lucas **LAVALLEE**	(19) 18.02.03
90	Alexandre **LETELLIER**	(32) 11.12.90
99	Gianluigi **DONNARUMMA** (Ita)	(23) 25.02.99

DEFENDERS

2	Achraf **HAKIMI** (Mar)	(24) 04.11.98
3	Presnel **KIMPEMBE**	(27) 13.08.95
4	Sergio **RAMOS** (Spa)	(36) 30.03.86
5	**MARQUINHOS** (Bra)	(28) 14.05.94
14	Juan **BERNAT** (Spa)	(29) 01.03.93
25	Nuno **MENDES** (Por)	(20) 19.06.02
26	Nordi **MUKIELE**	(25) 01.11.97
29	Timothee **PEMBELE**	(20) 09.09.02
31	El Chadaille **BITSHIABU**	(17) 16.05.05

MIDFIELDERS

6	Marco **VERRATTI** (Ita)	(30) 05.11.92
8	**FABIAN** Ruiz (Spa)	(26) 03.04.96
15	**DANILO** Pereira (Por)	(31) 09.09.91
17	**VITINHA** (Por)	(22) 13.02.00
18	Renato **SANCHES** (Por)	(25) 18.08.97
28	Carlos **SOLER** (Spa)	(26) 02.01.97
33	Warren **ZAIRE-EMERY**	(16) 08.03.06
35	Ismael **GHARBI** (Spa)	(18) 10.04.04

FORWARDS

7	Kylian **MBAPPE**	(24) 20.12.98
10	**NEYMAR** (Bra)	(30) 05.02.92
30	Lionel **MESSI** (Arg)	(35) 24.06.87
37	Ilyes **HOUSNI**	(17) 14.05.05
44	Hugo **EKITIKE**	(20) 20.06.02

COACH

	Christophe **GALTIER**	(56) 23.08.66

REIMS

GOALKEEPERS

30	Nicolas **PENNETEAU**	(41) 28.02.81
40	Florent **DUPARCHY**	(22) 20.06.00
94	Yehvann **DIOUF**	(23) 16.11.99
96	Alexandre **OLLIERO**	(27) 15.02.96

DEFENDERS

4	Maxime **BUSI** (Bel)	(23) 14.10.99
5	Yunis **ABDELHAMID** (Mar)	(35) 28.09.87
24	Emmanuel **AGBADOU** (Civ)	(25) 17.06.97
25	Thibault **DE SMET** (Bel)	(24) 05.06.98
32	Thomas **FOKET** (Bel)	(28) 25.09.94

MIDFIELDERS

3	Kamory **DOUMBIA** (Mli)	(19) 18.02.03
8	Jens **CAJUSTE** (Swe)	(23) 10.08.99
10	Arber **ZENELI** (Kvx)	(27) 25.02.95
15	Marshall **MUNETSI** (Zim)	(26) 22.06.96
17	Dion **LOPY** (Sen)	(20) 02.02.02
21	Azor **MATUSIWA** (Ned)	(24) 28.04.98
70	Alexis **FLIPS**	(23) 18.01.00

FORWARDS

7	Noah **HOLM** (Nor)	(21) 23.05.01
9	Kaj **SIERHUIS** (Ned)	(21) 23.05.01
11	Myziane **MAOLIDA**	(23) 14.02.99
19	Mitchell **VAN BERGEN** (Ned)	(23) 27.08.99
29	Folarin **BALOGUN** (Eng)	(21) 03.07.01
39	Junya **ITO** (Jpn)	(29) 09.03.93

COACH

	Will **STILL** (Bel)	(30) 14.10.92

RENNES

GOALKEEPERS

1	Dogan **ALEMDAR** (Tur)	(20) 29.10.02
30	Steve **MANDANDA**	(37) 28.03.85
39	Elias **DAMERGY**	(20) 17.10.02
89	Romain **SALIN**	(38) 29.07.84

DEFENDERS

2	Joe **RODON** (Wal)	(25) 27.10.97
3	Adrien **TRUFFERT**	(21) 20.11.01
5	Arthur **THEATE** (Bel)	(22) 25.05.00
15	Christopher **WOOH** (Cmr)	(21) 18.09.01
18	Jeanuel **BELOCIAN**	(17) 17.02.05
22	Lorenz **ASSIGNON**	(22) 22.06.00
23	Warmed **OMARI**	(22) 23.04.00
25	Birger **MELING** (Nor)	(28) 17.12.94
27	Hamari **TRAORE** (Mli)	(30) 27.01.92
31	Guela **DOUE**	(20) 17.10.02
90	Djed **SPENCE** (Eng)	(22) 09.08.00

MIDFIELDERS

6	Lesley **UGOCHUKWU**	(18) 26.03.04
8	Baptiste **SANTAMARIA**	(27) 09.03.95
14	Benjamin **BOURIGEAUD**	(29) 14.01.94
20	Flavien **TAIT**	(29) 02.02.93
21	Lovro **MAJER** (Cro)	(25) 17.01.98
33	Desire **DOUE**	(18) 03.06.05
80	**XEKA** (Por)	(28) 10.11.94

FORWARDS

7	Martin **TERRIER**	(25) 04.03.97
9	Arnaud **KALIMUENDO**	(21) 20.01.02
11	Jeremy **DOKU** (Bel)	(20) 27.05.02
17	Karl **TOKO EKAMBI** (Cmr)	(30) 14.09.92
19	Amine **GOUIRI**	(23) 16.02.00
34	Ibrahim **SALAH** (Mar)	(21) 30.08.01

COACH

	Bruno **GENESIO**	(56) 01.09.66

STRASBOURG

GOALKEEPERS

1	Matz **SELS** (Bel)	(30) 26.02.92
16	Eiji **KAWASHIMA** (Jpn)	(39) 20.03.83
40	Robin **RISSER**	(18) 02.12.04
	Alexandre **PIERRE** (Hai)	(21) 25.02.01

DEFENDERS

2	Colin **DAGBA**	(24) 09.09.98
3	Thomas **DELAINE**	(30) 24.03.92
5	Lucas **PERRIN**	(24) 19.11.98
22	Gerzino **NYAMSI**	(25) 22.01.97
23	Maxime **LE MARCHAND**	(33) 11.10.89
24	Alexander **DJIKU** (Gha)	(28) 09.08.94
29	Ismael **DOUKOURE**	(19) 24.07.03
32	Frederic **GUILBERT**	(28) 24.12.94
77	Eduard **SOBOL** (Ukr)	(27) 20.04.95

MIDFIELDERS

6	Jean-Eudes **AHOLOU** (Civ)	(28) 20.03.94
8	Morgan **SANSON**	(28) 18.08.94
11	Dimitri **LIENARD**	(35) 13.02.88
14	Sanjin **PRCIC** (Bih)	(29) 20.11.93
17	Jean-Ricner **BELLEGARDE**	(24) 27.06.98
18	Yuito **SUZUKI** (Jpn)	(21) 25.10.01
19	Habib **DIARRA**	(19) 03.01.04
27	Ibrahima **SISSOKO**	(25) 27.10.97
34	Nordine **KANDIL**	(21) 31.10.01

FORWARDS

9	Kevin **GAMEIRO**	(35) 09.05.87
12	Lebo **MOTHIBA** (Rsa)	(27) 28.01.96
20	Habib **DIALLO** (Sen)	(27) 18.06.95

COACH

	Mathieu **LE SCORNET**	(39) 02.05.83

TOULOUSE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Thomas **HIMEUR**	(22) 17.01.01
16	Kjetil **HAUG** (Nor)	(24) 12.06.98
30	Maxime **DUPE**	(29) 04.03.93
50	Guillaume **RESTES**	(17) 11.03.05

DEFENDERS

2	Rasmus **NICOLAISEN** (Den)	(25) 16.03.97
3	Mikkel **DESLER** (Den)	(27) 19.02.95
4	Anthony **ROUAULT**	(21) 29.05.01
14	Logan **COSTA** (Cpv)	(21) 01.04.01
15	Gabriel **SUAZO** (Chi)	(25) 09.08.97
18	Olivier **ZANDEN** (Swe)	(21) 14.08.01
23	Moussa **DIARRA**	(22) 10.11.00
26	Warren **KAMANZI** (Nor)	(22) 11.11.00
31	Kevin **KEBEN** (Cmr)	(18) 26.01.04

MIDFIELDERS

5	Denis **GENREAU** (Aus)	(23) 21.05.99
8	Branco **VAN DEN BOOMEN** (Ned)	(27) 21.07.95
10	Brecht **DEJAEGERE** (Bel)	(31) 29.05.91
13	Vincent **SIERRO** (Sui)	(27) 08.10.95
17	Stijn **SPIERINGS** (Ned)	(26) 12.03.96
24	Theocharis **TSINGARAS** (Gre)	(22) 20.08.00
28	Fares **CHAIBI**	(20) 28.11.02

FORWARDS

6	Zakaria **ABOUKHLAL** (Mar)	(22) 18.02.00
7	Ado **ONAIWU** (Jpn)	(27) 08.11.95
9	Rhys **HEALEY** (Eng)	(28) 06.12.94
19	Veljko **BIRMANCEVIC** (Srb)	(24) 05.03.98
21	Rafael **RATAO** (Bra)	(27) 30.11.95
27	Thijs **DALLINGA** (Ned)	(22) 03.08.00
29	Said **HAMULIC** (Ned)	(22) 12.11.00

COACH

	Philippe **MONTANIER**	(58) 15.11.64

TROYES

GOALKEEPERS

1	Mateusz **LIS** (Pol)	(25) 27.02.97
30	Gauthier **GALLON**	(29) 23.04.93
40	Jessy **MOULIN**	(37) 13.01.86

DEFENDERS

2	Jackson **POROZO** (Ecu)	(22) 04.08.00
4	Eric **PALMER-BROWN** (USA)	(25) 24.04.97
12	Abdu **CONTE** (Por)	(24) 24.03.98
17	Yoann **SALMIER** (Guf)	(30) 21.11.92
18	Thierno **BALDE**	(20) 10.06.02
19	Andreas **BRUUS** (Den)	(24) 16.01.99
22	Tanguy **ZOUKROU**	(19) 07.05.03
23	Adil **RAMI**	(37) 27.12.85
37	Eric **N'JO**	(18) 01.06.04
39	Yasser **LAROUCI** (Alg)	(22) 01.01.01

MIDFIELDERS

5	Tristan **DINGOME** (Cmr)	(32) 17.02.91
6	Rominigue **KOUAME** (Mli)	(26) 17.12.96
10	Florian **TARDIEU**	(30) 22.04.92
11	Rony **LOPES** (Por)	(27) 28.12.95
15	Ante **PALAVERSA** (Cro)	(22) 06.04.00
24	Xavier **CHAVALERIN**	(31) 07.03.91
28	Derek **MAZOU-SACKO**	(18) 06.10.04
31	Danel **DONGMO** (Cmr)	(22) 31.01.01

FORWARDS

7	Mama **BALDE** (Gnb)	(27) 06.11.95
8	Lucien **AGOUME**	(21) 09.02.02
9	Ike **UGBO** (Can)	(24) 21.09.98
14	Jeff **REINE-ADELAIDE**	(25) 17.01.98
20	Renaud **RIPART**	(29) 14.03.93
21	Marlos **MORENO** (Col)	(26) 20.09.96
25	Alexis **TIBIDI**	(19) 03.11.03
26	Papa Ndiaga **YADE** (Sen)	(23) 05.01.00
27	Kyliane **DONG**	(18) 27.09.04
29	Wilson **ODOBERT**	(18) 28.11.04
44	Levi **LUMEKA** (Eng)	(24) 05.09.98

COACH

	Patrick **KISNORBO** (Aus)	(41) 24.03.81

(Ages as of 17.02.23)

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Internationals

2022 AFRICAN NATIONS CHAMPIONSHIP

Group A

Jan 13 – Algiers
Algeria 1 (Mahious 57 pen)
Libya 0

Jan 14 – Algiers
Ethiopia 0
Mozambique 0

Jan 17 – Algiers
Algeria 1 (Mahious 52)
Ethiopia 0

Jan 17 – Algiers
Mozambique 3 (Melque 78, Jone 80, Lau Ha King 85)
Libya 2 (Chico 23 og, Saltou 90+3)

Jan 21 – Algiers
Mozambique 0
Algeria 1 (Dehiri 7)

Jan 21 – Annaba
Libya 3 (Abu Arqoub 44, Al Abbasi 50, Saltou 78)
Ethiopia 1 (Panom 39 pen)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Algeria (Q)	3	3	0	0	3	0	9
Mozambique (Q)	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Libya	3	1	0	2	5	5	3
Ethiopia	3	0	1	2	1	4	1

Group B

Jan 14 – Annaba
DR Congo 0
Uganda 0

Jan 14 – Annaba
Ivory Coast 0
Senegal 1 (Mo. Ndiaye 80)

Jan 18 – Annaba
DR Congo 0
Ivory Coast 0

Jan 18 – Annaba
Senegal 0
Uganda 1 (Karisa 33)

Jan 22 – Annaba
Senegal 3 (O. Diouf 23, Diallo 74, Siadi 77 og)
DR Congo 0

Jan 22 – Algiers
Uganda 1 (Waiswa 34 pen)
Ivory Coast 3 (Karamoko 12, Ouotro 27, Kouame 78)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Senegal (Q)	3	2	0	1	4	1	6
Ivory Coast (Q)	3	1	1	1	3	2	4
Uganda	3	1	1	1	2	3	4
DR Congo	3	0	2	1	0	3	2

Group C

Jan 15 – Constantine
Morocco -
Sudan -
Match cancelled

Jan 15 – Constantine
Madagascar 2 (Razafidranaivo 10, Randriatsiferana 62)
Ghana 1 (Agyapong 68)

Jan 19 – Constantine
Morocco -
Madagascar -
Match cancelled

Jan 19 – Constantine
Ghana 3 (Yiadom 45+3, Afriyie Barnieh 65, Suraj 90+8)
Sudan 1 (Nooh 31)

Jan 23 – Constantine
Morocco -
Madagascar -
Match cancelled

Jan 23 – Constantine
Sudan 0
Madagascar 3 (Randriatsiferana 13, Razafidranaivo 30, Rafanomezantsoa 33)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Madagascar (Q)	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Ghana (Q)	2	1	0	1	4	3	3
Sudan	2	0	0	2	1	6	0
Morocco*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

**Morocco withdrew prior to the tournament*

Group D

Jan 16 – Oran
Mali 3 (Sinayoko 23, Diaby 79, Coulibaly 83)
Angola 3 (Depu 12, 26, Gilberto 72)

Jan 20 – Oran
Angola 0
Mauritania 0

Jan 24 – Oran
Mauritania 1 (Sy 53)
Mali 0

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mauritania (Q)	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Angola	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
Mali	2	0	1	1	3	4	1

Group E

Jan 16 – Oran
Cameroon 1 (Ngom Mbekeli 63)
Congo 0

Jan 20 – Oran
Congo 0
Niger 0

Jan 24 – Oran
Niger 1 (Badamassi 69)
Cameroon 0

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Niger (Q)	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Cameroon	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Congo	2	0	1	1	0	1	1

Quarter-Finals

Jan 27 – Algiers
Algeria 1 (Mahious 90+6 pen)
Ivory Coast 0

Jan 27 – Annaba
Senegal 1 (Camara 34 pen)
Mauritania 0

Jan 28 – Constantine
Madagascar 3 (Razafindranaivo 18, Razafindrakoto 67, Ravelomanantsoa 86)
Mozambique 1 (Isac 90+4)

Jan 28 – Oran
Niger 2 (Yiadom 11 og, Hainikoye 49)
Ghana 0

Semi-Finals

Jan 31 – Oran
Algeria 5 (Abdellaoui 15, Mahious 24, 34, Katakore 45 og, Bayazid 83)
Niger 0

Jan 31 – Algiers
Senegal 1 (Diallo 5)
Madagascar 0

Third Place Play-Off

Feb 3 – Oran
Niger 0
Madagascar 1 (Razafindrakoto 90)

Final

Feb 4 – Algiers
Algeria 0
Senegal 0
After Extra-Time. Senegal win 5-4 on penalties
Algeria: Guendouz – Belkhither, Keddad, Belaid, Abdellaoui, Laouafi; Bakir (Kendouci 68), Mrezigue (Djahnit 120+2), Draoui; Meziane (Bayazid 114), Mahious.
Senegal: Sy – Sane, Diouf, C. Ndiaye, Sidibe; Mo. Ndiaye, Kane, Camara; Mbaye (Kante 113), Koite (Ngom 83), Diallo (Balde 113).

2023 ARABIAN GULF CUP

Group A

Jan 6 – Basra
Iraq 0
Oman 0

Jan 6 – Basra
Yemen 0
Saudi Arabia 2 (Al Nabit 18, Al Juwayr 34 pen)

Jan 9 – Basra
Oman 3 (Fadhi 2 og, A. Al Alawi 37, Al Sabhi 47)
Yemen 2 (Al Matari 12 pen, O. Al Dahi 30)

Jan 9 – Basra
Saudi Arabia 0
Iraq 2 (Bayesh 30, Rostam 86)

Jan 12 – Basra
Iraq 5 (Nadhim 40, Attwan 64, Hussein 74 pen, 75, H. Ali 88)
Yemen 0

Jan 12 – Basra
Saudi Arabia 1 (Al Ammar 41)
Oman 2 (R. Al Alawi 34, Al Saadi 84)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iraq (Q)	3	2	1	0	7	0	7
Oman (Q)	3	2	1	0	5	3	7
Saudi Arabia	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Yemen	3	0	0	3	2	10	0

Group B

Jan 7 – Basra
Bahrain 2 (Al Aswad 60, Al Shaikh 77)
United Arab Emirates 1 (Tagliabue 90+2)

Jan 7 – Basra
Kuwait 0
Qatar 2 (Surag 21, Alaaeldin 37 pen)

Jan 10 – Basra
United Arab Emirates 0
Kuwait 1 (Al Dhefiri 90+3)

Jan 10 – Basra
Qatar 1 (Alaaeldin 34)
Bahrain 2 (Waad 72 og, Yusuf 89 pen)

Jan 13 – Basra
Bahrain 1 (Al Humaidan 26)
Kuwait 1 (Al Khaldi 45)

Jan 13 – Basra
United Arab Emirates 1 (Lima 77)
Qatar 1 (Al Abdullah 88)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bahrain (Q)	3	2	1	0	5	3	7
Qatar (Q)	3	1	1	1	4	3	4
Kuwait	3	1	1	1	2	3	4
UAE	3	0	1	2	2	4	1

Semi-Finals

Jan 16 – Basra
Iraq 2 (Bayesh 19, Hussein 43)
Qatar 1 (Surag 28)

Jan 16 – Basra
Bahrain 0
Oman 1 (Al Yahmadi 83)

Final

Jan 19 – Basra
Iraq 3 (Bayesh 24, Attwan 116 pen, Younis 120+2)
Oman 2 (Al Yahyaei 90+10 pen, Al Malki 119)
After Extra-Time
Iraq: Hassan – Ghasem (Jabar 105), Nadhim, Faez, Ismail (Rustom 86); Bayesh, Al Ammari (Amin 90+7); Kareem (M. Ali 46), Attwan, H. Ali (Younis 90+2); Hussein (Abdulkareem 85).
Oman: Al Mukhaini – Al Khamisi (A. Al Alawi 77), Durbin, Al Musalami, Al Kaabi; Al Yahmadi, Al Saadi, Al Aghbari (Saleh 104); Al Yahyaei (Al Maamari 109); Al Sabhi (Al Braiki 90+5), R. Al Alawi (Al Malki 78).

2022 AFF CHAMPIONSHIP

Group A

Dec 20 – Phnom Penh
Cambodia 3 (Bunheing 16, 59, Chanpolin 20)
Philippines 2 (Daniels 41, 55)

Dec 20 – Kuala Lumpur
Brunei 0
Thailand 5 (Bordin 19, Teerasil 44, Yura 88 og, Peeradon 90+1 pen, 90+3)

Dec 23 – Manila
Philippines 5 (Daniels 7, Reyes 12, Melliza 50, Rasmussen 51, 88)
Brunei 1 (Razimie 70)

Dec 23 – Jakarta
Indonesia 2 (Egy 7, Witan 35)
Cambodia 1 (Krya 16)

Dec 26 – Kuala Lumpur
Brunei 0
Indonesia 7 (Syahrian 20, Dendy 41, Egy 59, Spasojevic 60, Ramadhan 68, Klok 86, Sayuri 90+2)

Dec 26 – Pathum Thani
Thailand 4 (Teerasil 3, 41 pen, Adisak 57, Suphanan 63)
Philippines 0

Dec 29 – Phnom Penh
Cambodia 5 (Chanchav 31, Taylor 50 pen, Sokpheng 73 pen, Pisoth 80, 88)
Brunei 1 (Nur Ikhwan 21)

Dec 29 – Jakarta
Indonesia 1 (Klok 50 pen)
Thailand 1 (Sarach 79)

Jan 2 – Pathum Thani
Thailand 3 (Teerasil 45+2 pen, 90, Sumanya 50)
Cambodia 1 (Chanthea 68)

Jan 2 – Manila
Philippines 1 (Rasmussen 83)
Indonesia 2 (Dendy 21, Marselino 43)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Thailand (Q)	4	3	1	0	13	2	10
Indonesia (Q)	4	3	1	0	12	3	10
Cambodia	4	2	0	2	10	8	6
Philippines	4	1	0	3	8	10	3
Brunei	4	0	0	4	2	22	0

Group B

Dec 21 – Yangon
Myanmar 0
Malaysia 1 (Faisal 52)

Dec 21 – Vientiane
Laos 0
Vietnam 6 (Nguyen Tien Linh 15, Do Hung Dung 43, Ho Tan Tai 55, Doan Van Hau 58, Nguyen Van Toan 82, Vu Van Thanh 90+1)

Dec 24 – Singapore
Singapore 3 (Ilhan 45, Shah 49, Shawal 74)
Myanmar 2 (Maung Maung Lwin 34, 66)

Dec 24 – Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia 5 (Aguero 29, Faisal 65, 68, Haqimi 77, Wilkin 87)
Laos 0

Dec 27 – Vientiane
Laos 0
Singapore 2 (Irfan 32, Shawal 90+4)

Dec 27 – Hanoi
Vietnam 3 (Nguyen Tien Linh 28, Que Ngoc Hai 64 pen, Nguyen Hoang Duc 83)
Malaysia 0

Dec 30 – Yangon
Myanmar 2 (Kyaw Min Oo 15, Maung Maung Lwin 90+6)
Laos 2 (Soukaphone 12, Ekkamai 46)

Dec 30 – Singapore
Singapore 0
Vietnam 0

Jan 3 – Hanoi
Vietnam 3 (Kyaw Zin Lwin 8 og, Nguyen Tien Linh 27, Chau Ngoc Quang 72)
Myanmar 0

Jan 3 – Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia 4 (D. Lok 35, Wilkin 50, 54, Aguero 88)
Singapore 1 (Faris 85)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vietnam (Q)	4	3	1	0	12	0	10
Malaysia (Q)	4	3	0	1	10	4	9
Singapore	4	2	1	1	6	6	7
Myanmar	4	0	1	3	4	9	1
Laos	4	0	1	3	2	15	1

Semi-Finals – 1st leg

Jan 6 – Jakarta
Indonesia 0
Vietnam 0

Jan 7 – Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia 1 (Faisal 11)
Thailand 0

Semi-Finals – 2nd leg

Jan 9 – Hanoi
Vietnam 2 (Nguyen Tien Linh 3, 47)
Indonesia 0
Vietnam win 2-0 on aggregate

Jan 9 – Pathum Thani
Thailand 3 (Teerasil 19, Bordin 55, Adisak 71)
Malaysia 0
Thailand win 3-1 on aggregate

Final – 1st leg

Jan 13 – Hanoi
Vietnam 2 (Nguyen Tien Linh 24, Vu Van Thanh 88)
Thailand 2 (Poramet 48, Sarach 63)
Vietnam: Dang Van Lam – Ho Tan Tai (Vu Van Thanh 85), Do Duy Manh (Bui Hoang Viet Anh 58), Que Ngoc Hai, Bui Tien Dung (Nguyen Thanh Binh 85), Doan Van Hau; Do Hung Dung, Nguyen Hoang Duc, Nguyen Quang Hai (Nguyen Van Quyet 97); Pham Tuan Hai (Phan Van Duc 58), Nguyen Tien Linh.
Thailand: Kampol – Suphanan, Kritsada, Pansa, Weerathep, Sasalak; Peeradon, Theerathon, Sarach (Sumanya 84); Poramet (Bordin 79), Adisak (Ekanit 74).

Final – 2nd leg

Jan 16 – Pathum Thani
Thailand 1 (Theerathon 24)
Vietnam 0
Thailand win 3-2 on aggregate
Thailand: Kampol – Suphanan, Kritsada, Pansa, Weerathep (Sumanya 88), Sasalak (Chalermsak 90+2); Peeradon, Theerathon, Sarach (Jakkapan 73); Poramet (Bordin 72), Adisak (Ekanit 72).
Sent off: Peeradon 90+5.
Vietnam: Dang Van Lam – Vu Van Thanh (Nguyen Thanh Chung 68), Bui Hoang Viet Anh (Do Duy Manh 46), Que Ngoc Hai, Nguyen Thanh Binh, Doan Van Hau; Do Hung Dung (Nguyen Van Toan I 75), Nguyen Hoang Duc, Nguyen Tuan Anh (Nguyen Quang Hai 36); Nguyen Tien Linh, Phan Van Duc (Pham Tuan Hai 46).

2022-23 UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE

Finals Draw

Semi-Finals

Jun 14-15:
Netherlands v Croatia;
Spain v Italy

Third Place Play-Off and Final to be played June 18

FRIENDLIES

Jan 3 – Jemmal
Uganda 2 (Watambala 2, Orit 13)
Sudan 2 (Abdelrahman 6 pen, Kuwa 65)

Jan 8 – Albufeira
Iceland 1 (A. Gudjohnsen 90+1 pen)
Estonia 1 (Zenjov 45)

Jan 9 – Algarve
Sweden 2 (Nyman 38, Asoro 90+3)
Finland 0

Jan 12 – Albufeira
Finland 0
Estonia 1 (Miller 84)

Jan 12 – Algarve
Sweden 2 (Andersson 85, Ondrejka 90+4)
Iceland 1 (Gudjohnsen 30)

Jan 26 – Los Angeles
United States 1 (Vazquez 29)
Serbia 2 (L. Ilic 43, Simic 46)

Jan 29 – Port of Spain
Trinidad & Tobago 2 (Fortune 65, Gill 86)
Saint-Martin 0

Jan 29 – Carson
United States 0
Colombia 0

Club Football

EUROPE

2022-23 SPANISH SUPER CUP

Semi-Finals

Jan 11 – Riyadh
Real Madrid 1 (Benzema 39 pen)
Valencia 1 (Lino 46)
AET. Real Madrid win 4-3 on penalties
Real Madrid: Courtois – Vazquez (Carvajal 68), Militao (Mendy 74), Rudiger, Nacho; Valverde (Ceballos 105), Kroos, Camavinga (Modric 46); Rodrygo (Asensio 84), Benzema, Vinicius Junior.
Valencia: Mamardashvili – Correia, Comert, Ozkacar, Gaya; Lato (Moriba 95), Musah (Foulquier 95), Almeida (Guillamon 95), Kluivert (Duro 73); Lino (Perez 82), Cavani.

Jan 12 – Riyadh
Real Betis 2 (Fekir 77, Loren 101)
Barcelona 2 (Lewandowski 40, Fati 93)
AET. Barcelona win 4-2 on penalties
Real Betis: Bravo – Ruibal (Sabaly 78), Pezzella, Luiz Felipe, Miranda; Rodriguez (Guardado 86), Canales (Carvalho 46); Luiz Henrique, Fekir (Moron 90), Rodri (Juanmi 78); Iglesias (Willian Jose 67).
Sent off: Guardado 118.
Barcelona: Ter Stegen – Roberto (Christensen 78), Araujo, Kounde, Alba (Alonso 79); Gavi (Kessie 96), De Jong (Busquets 63), Pedri; Raphinha (Fati 86), Lewandowski, Dembele (Torres 63).

Final

Jan 15 – Riyadh
Real Madrid 1 (Benzema 90+3)
Barcelona 3 (Gavi 33, Lewandowski 45, Pedri 69)
Real Madrid: Courtois – Carvajal (Nacho 72), Militao, Rudiger, Mendy; Modric (Ceballos 65), Kroos (Asensio 72), Camavinga (Rodrygo 46); Valverde, Benzema, Vinicius Junior.
Barcelona: Ter Stegen – Araujo (Garcia 86), Kounde, Christensen, Balde; De Jong (Kessie 87), Busquets, Gavi (Fati 90); Dembele (Raphinha 78), Lewandowski, Pedri (Roberto 90).

2022 ITALIAN SUPER CUP

Jan 18 – Riyadh
Milan 0
Internazionale 3 (Dimarco 10, Dzeko 21, Martinez 77)
Milan: Tatarusanu – Calabria (Dest 80), Kjaer (Kalulu 65), Tomori, Hernandez; Tonali, Bennacer; Messias (Origi 65), Diaz (De Ketelaere 65), Leao; Giroud (Rebic 81).
Internazionale: Onana – Darmian, Skriniar, Acerbi, Bastoni (De Vrij 85), Dimarco (Gosens 63); Barella (Gagliardini 71), Calhanoglu (Asllani 84), Mkhitaryan; Dzeko (Correa 71), Martinez.

PORTUGUESE LEAGUE CUP

Final

Jan 28 – Leiria
Sporting 0
Porto 2 (Eustaquio 10, Marcano 86)
Sporting: Adan – Inacio, Coates (St Juste 81), Matheus Reis; Porro, Ugarte (Arthur Gomes 84), Morita (Tanlongo 84), Santos (Fatawu Issahaku 56); Edwards (Trincao 81), Goncalves, Paulinho.
Sent off: Paulinho 72.
Porto: Ramos – Mario, Pepe (Cardoso 90+5), Marcano, Wendell (Sanusi 79); Otavio, Uribe, Eustaquio (Folha 89); Pepe Aquino (Borges 88), Galeno, Taremi (Namaso 90+5).

ASIA

2022-23 AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

West Region

Round of 16 Draw

Feb 19-20:
Al Hilal (KSA) v Shabab Al Ahli (UAE);
Al Shabab (KSA) v Nasaf Qarshi (Uzb);
Al Duhail (Qat) v Al Rayyan (Qat);
Al Faisaly (KSA) v Foolad (Irn)

Future Dates

Quarter-finals to be played February 23
Semi-finals to be played February 26
Two-legged final to be played against East Region winners Urawa Reds (Jpn) April 19 and May 6

BHUTAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Paro (C)	18	15	3	0	65	8	48
Thimphu City	18	13	4	1	48	12	43
Druk Lhayul	18	12	4	2	38	18	40
RTC	18	9	3	6	44	25	30
Transport United	18	8	4	6	54	23	28
Ugyen Academy	18	7	4	7	33	31	25
BFF Academy U19	18	5	2	11	29	42	17
Tensung	18	4	2	12	17	44	14
Takin	18	2	0	16	15	78	6
Paro Rinpung	18	1	2	15	21	83	5

TURKMENISTAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ahal (C)	28	23	4	1	89	21	73
Altyn Asyr	28	18	7	3	48	18	61
Merw	28	14	4	10	44	39	46
Kopetdag	28	14	3	11	46	40	45
Sagadam	28	10	4	14	45	44	34
Asgabat	28	9	3	16	30	44	30
Nebitci	28	5	2	21	31	81	17
Energetik	28	4	3	21	18	64	15

UZBEKISTAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pakhtakor (C)	26	15	9	2	47	18	54
Navbahor	26	15	8	3	33	15	53
Nasaf	26	13	10	3	37	16	49
AGMK	26	13	5	8	44	23	44
Qizilqum	26	12	3	11	34	36	39
Olympic	26	7	14	5	31	28	35
Sogdiana	26	9	7	10	31	31	34
Bunyodkor	26	9	7	10	29	37	34
Neftchi	26	8	8	10	31	32	32
Metalourg	26	8	8	10	19	27	32
Termez Surkhon	26	7	5	14	25	44	26
Lokomotiv* (R)	26	6	6	14	22	36	24
Kokand-1912 (R)	26	4	10	12	21	38	22
Dinamo Samarqand (R)	26	3	6	17	24	47	15

**Lost relegation play-off*

SOUTH AMERICA

2023 COPA LIBERTADORES

First Qualifying Stage Draw

Sport Huancayo (Per) v Nacional (Par);
Nacional Potosi (Bol) v El Nacional (Ecu);
Boston River (Uru) v Zamora (Ven)

First legs to be played February 7-9
Second legs to be played February 14-16

Second Qualifying Stage Draw

Carabobo (Ven) v Atletico Mineiro (Bra);
Sport Huancayo (Per)/Nacional (Par) v Sporting Cristal (Per);
Deportivo Maldonado (Uru) v Fortaleza (Bra);
Nacional Potosi (Bol)/El Nacional (Ecu) v Independiente Medellin (Col);

Magallanes (Chi) v Always Ready (Bol);
Curico Unido (Chi) v Cerro Porteno (Par);
Boston River (Uru)/Zamora (Ven) v Huracan (Arg);
Universidad Catolica (Ecu) v Millonarios (Col)

First legs to be played February 21-23
Second legs to be played February 28-March 2

Future Dates

Third qualifying stage to be played March 7-9 (first legs) and March 14-16 (second legs)
Group stage to begin April 4-6

2023 COPA SUDAMERICANA

First Qualifying Stage Draw

Bolivia Section

Mar 8-9:
Guabira v Oriente Petrolero;
Blooming v Atletico Palmaflor

Chile Section

Mar 7-9:
Cobresal v Palestino;
Audax Italiano v Universidad Catolica

Colombia Section

Mar 8-9:
Tolima v Junior;
Aguilas Doradas v Santa Fe

Ecuador Section

Mar 7-9:
LDU Quito v Delfin;
Emelec v Deportivo Cuenca

Paraguay Section

Mar 7-8:
Guarani v Sportivo Ameliano;
Tacuary v General Caballero (JLM)

Peru Section

Mar 8-9:
Universidad Cesar Vallejo v Binacional;
Universitario v Cienciano

Uruguay Section

Mar 7-8:
Defensor Sporting v Danubio;
River Plate v Penarol

Venezuela Section

Mar 7-8:
Caracas v Academica Puerto Cabello;
Estudiantes de Merida v Deportivo Tachira

Future Dates

Group stage to begin April 4-6

2022 ARGENTINA SUPER CUP

Jan 20 – Al Ain
Boca Juniors 1 (Roncaglia 16)
Racing Club 2 (Carbonero 19, Piovi 90+7 pen)

2023 BRAZILIAN SUPER CUP

Jan 28 – Brasilia
Palmeiras 4 (Raphael Veiga 37, 57 pen, Gabriel Menino 45+3, 73)
Flamengo 3 (Gabriel Barbosa 25 pen, 50, Pedro 60)

CONCACAF

2023 CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Round of 16

Violette (Hai) v Austin FC (USA);
Tauro (Pan) v Leon (Mex);
Tigres UANL (Mex) v Orlando City (USA);
Motagua (Hon) v Pachuca (Mex);
Vancouver Whitecaps (Can) v Real Espana (Hon);
Alajuelense (Crc) v Los Angeles FC (USA);
Olimpia (Hon) v Atlas (Mex);
Alianza (Slv) v Philadelphia Union (USA)

First legs to be played March 7-9
Second legs to be played March 14-16

Future Dates

Quarter-finals to be played April 4-6 (first legs) and April 11-13 (second legs)
Semi-finals to be played April 25-27 (first legs) and May 2-4 (second legs)
Two-legged final to be played May 31 and June 4

BELIZE

Opening Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Altitude*	14	10	2	2	22	10	32
Verdes*	14	7	6	1	24	9	27
San Pedro Pirates*	14	6	5	3	20	13	23
Progresso*	14	4	6	4	12	12	18
Benque	14	4	4	6	15	17	16
Port Layola	14	5	1	8	17	20	16
Wagiya	14	4	2	8	15	23	14
Bandits	14	2	2	10	11	32	8

*Qualify for semi-finals

Semi-Finals – 1st leg

Nov 12:
San Pedro Pirates 2-2 Verdes

Nov 13:
Progresso 1-2 Altitude

Semi-Finals – 2nd leg

Nov 19:
Altitude 1-0 Progresso (agg 3-1)

Nov 20:
Verdes 3-2 San Pedro Pirates (agg 5-4)

Final – 1st leg

Nov 27:
Verdes 1-1 Altitude

Final – 2nd leg

Dec 11:
Altitude 1-1 Verdes (agg 2-2)
AET. Altitude win 11-10 on penalties

PUERTO RICO

Apertura

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Metropolitan*	8	7	0	1	26	7	21
PR Sol*	8	5	1	2	12	10	16
Bayamon*	8	2	2	4	9	13	8
Academia Quintana*	8	2	1	5	16	18	7
Caguas Sporting	8	1	2	5	5	20	5

*Qualify for semi-finals

Semi-Finals

Dec 7:
Metropolitan 4-2 Academia Quintana

Dec 8:
PR Sol 2-2 Bayamon
AET. PR Sol win 7-6 on penalties

Final

Dec 12:
Metropolitan 1-1 PR Sol
AET. Metropolitan win 4-3 on penalties

AFRICA

REUNION

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Saint-Denis (C)	26	21	2	3	73	18	91
Saint-Pierroise	25	15	5	5	42	13	75
Excelsior	26	13	6	7	44	22	71
La Tamponnaise	26	12	5	9	42	31	67
Sainte-Marienne	26	11	7	8	27	28	66
Jeanne d'Arc	26	12	4	10	26	22	66
Capricorne	26	12	3	11	24	25	65
Trois Bassins	26	11	4	11	33	35	63
Saint-Pauloise	26	9	10	7	35	22	63
Saint-Louis	26	8	8	10	21	32	58
Sainte-Suzanne*	26	8	6	12	24	41	56
Sainte-Rose (R)	26	6	7	13	34	47	51
Marsouins (R)	26	3	5	18	22	44	40
Parfin (R)	25	2	2	21	17	84	33

*Enter relegation play-off

OCEANIA

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Highlands

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ape Aporo*	10	9	1	0	28	3	28
Kuri*	10	6	2	2	16	11	20
Radza	10	5	3	2	15	8	18
Mount Hagen	10	4	1	5	11	10	13
Goroka	10	1	1	8	4	23	4
Wapak	10	1	0	9	5	24	3

*Qualify for quarter-finals

NGI Central

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kimbe Eagles*	10	7	2	1	19	10	23
Laheri*	10	5	2	3	23	18	17
West Tribes	10	5	2	3	21	17	17
WNB Tavur	10	5	0	5	19	18	15
NBPOL Greengold Liners	10	2	3	5	16	20	9
Seeds	10	1	1	8	11	26	4

*Qualify for play-offs

NGI Eastern

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Panguna Metals*	10	8	1	1	23	20	25
Wantoks*	10	6	2	2	36	15	20
Bougainville United	10	6	2	2	34	13	20
Kiara	10	3	0	7	20	24	9
Laden Sankamup	10	3	0	7	21	36	9
North Bougainville	10	1	1	8	16	42	4

*Qualify for play-offs

Northern Conference

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lae City*	10	9	1	0	42	9	28
Lae Natives*	10	6	1	3	29	21	19
Lae City Dwellers	10	4	2	4	19	12	14
Morobe Wawens	10	3	3	4	21	22	12
Tusbab Stallions	10	3	1	6	24	29	10
Lahi	10	1	0	9	7	49	3

*Qualify for quarter-finals

Southern Conference

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hekari United*	10	9	1	0	38	8	28
PRK Gulf Komara*	9	5	2	2	36	11	17
Central Amoana	10	5	2	3	29	17	17
Genesis	9	2	3	4	12	15	9
NCD Souths	10	2	3	5	16	30	9
Capital District	10	0	1	9	6	56	1

*Qualify for quarter-finals

Play-Offs

Nov 22: Panguna Metals 2-1 Wantoks; Kimbe Eagles 1-0 Laheri

Quarter-Finals

Jan 13: PRK Gulf Komara 3-0 Kimbe Eagles; Lae City 4-2 Kuri; Hekari United 6-0 Panguna Metals; Ape Aporo 1-3 Lae Natives

Semi-Finals

Jan 20: PRK Gulf Komara 0-2 Hekari United; Lae Natives 0-2 Lae City

Third-Place Play-Off

Feb 4: PRK Gulf Komara 0-1 Lae Natives

Final

Feb 4: Hekari United 1-1 Lae City
AET. Lae City win 5-3 on penalties

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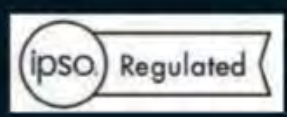

Ally McCoist

Rangers 3 Celtic 2

1984 Scottish League Cup final, Hampden Park

Ten Scottish league title wins and some memorable moments in a Scotland shirt are all part of Ally McCoist's impressive legacy, yet he goes back to the start of his Gers career when he tells World Soccer about his standout game...

Rangers legend ...Ally McCoist

"What was my best moment on a football pitch?

Now that's a tough question to answer because I was fortunate to have so many in my career and there are different ways to look at this. You have the title wins, the great Old Firm games against Celtic, the Scotland matches at Euro '96 and so many moments that are special for different reasons.

Yet ask me to pick out the one game that I look back on more fondly than any other and it might surprise you: the 1983-84 Scottish League Cup final against Celtic at Hampden Park, and there are a number of reasons why that game means so much.

It was my first domestic cup final and we beat Celtic 3-2 after extra-time. I managed to get a hat-trick to win it, but that only tells half of the story.

The only reason the game went into extra-time was because of my mistakes, as I gave away a penalty in the final minutes. You do something like that in a massive match and your heart sinks. That is a moment you could be remembered for, the one mistake that could come back to haunt you forever.

So when I managed to get the winner in extra-time and make sure that penalty incident would not be my abiding memory from that game, it highlights why it meant so much.

I was fortunate to win a lot in my career, but that first medal and the feeling it gives you is unbeatable. Until you do it and lift that cup, you always have doubts about whether you will be good enough be part of a successful Rangers team, but one win leads to another and that was very much the case for us as a team. You might say a League Cup win is not the most significant victory you could have on a CV, but it means a lot to me and every trophy I won has a special memory attached.

I'm not one of those players who looks back on my career and laments the moments that went against me. If you do that, you will drive yourself crazy. I've spoken to players who have won bigger trophies than me and they are regretful of the finals that got away or the titles they should have won. For me, I look back on my career in a different light.

I feel so blessed that I played in so many great teams, with great players, and to be part of so many great occasions.

Of course, there could be a list of things I wish would have turned out differently, but how many people have had the career I had? Not many. So I'm very grateful. It would be really selfish to sit here and say I'm disappointed about aspects of my football story, as the truth is I lived the dream time and again. It's only when you are out of football that you look back and think how amazing it was because when you are at a top club and challenging for trophies, it feels like the norm and you don't think about the end.

To look at my record now and see so many trophies on there is a source of great pride, but that first League Cup win in 1984 will always be special for me."

Interview by Kevin Palmer

Rangers
Manager: Jock Wallace

Dawson, MacDonald, Paterson, McPherson, McCoist, McGarvey, McCloy, McClelland, Russell, Clark, McClair, Nicholl, Cooper

Celtic
Manager: David Hay

Provan, McGrain, MacLeod, McAdam, Bonner, McStay, Aitken, Burns, Reid

Success...McCoist won the League Cup again 1987

"I lived the dream time and again"

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